

# **The Kung Fu Fandom Guide to Modern Chinese Action Cinema (1982 – 2000)**

**Compiled by  
Blake Dennis Matthews**

*For all the hundreds, if not thousands, of fans of Chinese action movies, who grew up on Jackie Chan throwing his stuntmen through real glass, or Yuen Biao doing spin kicks that defied physics before hanging from a rope to a plane in flight...without any CGI.*

This work is a compilation of reviews of modern-day action films hailing from Hong Kong, Taiwan, the People's Republic of China, and in some cases, the West. It was not made with the intention of making a profit, but as a personal database of film reviews in the classic "Leonard Maltin style" and as a means to preserve the writings of many internet fansites and fanpages that have since stopped updating for one reason or another.

At least half of the reviews included in this volume have been culled from the Kung Fu Fandom Forum, and represents the blood, sweat, and tears of dozens of forum members, many of whom no longer actively post today.

The other half of the reviews have been taken from different websites, some of which have been taken down, others of which are no longer updated, and a handful of which are still active. These include (but are not limited to):

- The Stunt People
- Teleport City
- View from the Brooklyn Bridge
- Stomp Tokyo
- Hong Kong Movie Database
- Internet Movie Database
- Girls With Guns dot org
- City on Fire
- The Spinning Image
- Hong Kong Film Net
- So Good Reviews
- Martial Artist's Guide to Hong Kong Films
- Cold Fusion Video
- Jabootu
- A Beautiful Film Worth Fighting For
- Far East Films

Most of the reviews have been reformatted to fit a specific template. As the reviews have been drawn from diverse sources, the lengths, quantity of spoilers, and information about the films may differ from one movie to another. Some favorites may have an entry lasting only a single paragraph, while other more obscure movies may have a review lasting two pages or more.

It should also be noted that not all opinions stated in the selected reviews will reflect the opinions of the other contributors and reviewers in this work.

Just to reiterate, despite my not citing specific who wrote what review, the original intent of this compilation was to provide myself with a database of reviews for as many old school movies as possible. I'm sharing it with others for the benefit of all.

- Blake Matthews

**Aces Go Places (Hong Kong, 1982: Eric Tsang) - aka *The Mad Mission*** - In 1980 Karl Maka, Dean Shek and Raymond Wong formed a new production company that they called Cinema City. Over the next decade the company produced a large number of films that in general were family oriented comedies that contained loads of slapstick antics, sight gags, corny romances and stunts. A lot of the comedy often appears – 20 years later – juvenile in nature, but some of it still feels inspired and amusing as well.

The largest success that the company had was the series of the *Aces Go Places* films that began in 1982 and continued with four sequels until 1989. The films were extremely popular (and still are today) and the three main actors – Samuel Hui, Karl Maka and Sylvia Chang - were to appear in all of them (with the exception of Sylvia in the fifth film). The list of directors for these five films is fairly impressive – Eric Tsang directed the first two, Tsui Hark the third, Ringo Lam the fourth and Lar Kar-leung the fifth.

The films are incredibly high spirited – very silly at times – full of slapstick and pratfall humor, eye opening stunts, a tune from Sam Hui and excellent action sequences. Though the action and stunts tend to be quite fun and imaginative, I find the comedy to be very hit and miss. Some of it is extremely clever – but much of it is too broad and farcical for my taste – almost Three Stooges type humor – which can wear a bit thin at times.

What the films do have going for them though is terrific chemistry between the three main characters. Hong Kong films had a tradition of the “buddy film” that was made very popular by Michael Hui in the 70’s. This series of films continues that tradition, but adds the wonderful Sylvia Chang to the mix. Sam Hui (Michael’s younger brother) is King Kong – smart, good looking, a great physical athlete (performs the majority of the action scenes), a weakness for a pretty face and the heart of a fifteen year adolescent. Karl Maka plays Kodojack a.k.a. Baldie a.k.a. Albert – a Chinese American cop completely full of his own high opinion of himself – and very little of it justified. Then to round them out is Sylvia Chang – as HK policewoman Nancy Ho - who can be as ferocious as a pit bull or soft and tender as a lullaby. The three of them play off one another to wonderful advantage – have great timing – and beneath the insults, threats and the braggadocio they create a warm sense of friendship and loyalty to one another.

In this first episode the three characters are introduced to one another and are initially all at odds with each other. The film begins in James Bondian fashion with a pre-credit action sequence that is very good. Sam has a bit of a larcenous nature and steals a bag of diamonds from some Mafioso types by shooting a harpoon from a roof top into a building across the road and then sliding down the rope, crashing into the room, grabbing the diamonds and escaping on a hidden motorcycle in the building and then later on a hang glider.

The Mafia head – doing his best Brando stuffed mouth imitation – sends White Gloves to HK to recover the valuables and to kill Hui. Word of this leaks out and White Glove’s number one nemesis in the world – Super Sleuth Kodojack – also comes to HK to track down his prey. He is teamed up with a tough grouchy cop - Sylvia Chang - and it is loathing on first sight. They do eventually warm up to each other – and Sylvia soon gets as giddy as a schoolgirl around her Albert. And Albert is only too happy to remind her, that she is closing in on thirty – old maid territory – and who but him would still marry her!

Eventually, the two of them force Hui to co-operate with them to catch White Glove but he has given the diamonds to his accomplice – Dean Shek – who has hidden them and then disappeared. The only clues they have to the whereabouts of the loot are tattoos on the bottoms of two of Shek’s girlfriends! Trying to uncover them leads to crazy shenanigans involving the triads and the HK ballet (run by Tsui Hark). Much of this is fairly entertaining and the comedy feels a bit lower key in contrast to the sequels in many ways. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridges)

**Aces Go Places 2 (Hong Kong, 1983: Eric Tsang) - *The Mad Mission 2*** - The second film in this popular series from Cinema City was also directed by Eric Tsang and like the others it is full of chases, pratfalls, gadgets galore, incredible stunts and a little romance. Now this is all tied to a plot that has the brainpower of a 1-watt bulb, but if that doesn’t interfere with your enjoyment of a film then this can be a fun ride. The emphasis of this one shifts somewhat from comedy to more action, stunts and technological mayhem. This is a good thing because the comedy bits felt weak and the constant mugging to the camera and the skit like nature becomes somewhat tiresome after a while. The action pieces though are terrific and some of the stunts are truly breathtaking.

Beginning soon after the first film ends, the Mafia is still trying to recover the diamonds and kill Hui. The first fifteen minutes of the film is a classic non-stop romp that is hugely entertaining and imaginative. A number of miniature helicopters controlled by a hitman crash through Hui’s apartment window and transform themselves into a giant killing robot. After a grueling battle with this, Sam escapes out of the high rise window by diving into a pool far

below and is then instantly pursued by six motorcycles around the streets of HK. There are some eye opening moments here – in particular one stunt in which a motorcycle lands on top of a moving bus and then drives off of it.

Before one can catch their breath, four hoods are chasing a beautiful damsel and Sam fights them off and is instantly smitten by her beauty. She is a major scam artist though and hoodwinks Sam into helping her rob a bank. And again the chase is on – with some lovely bicycle maneuvers from Hui. It turns out that he is the best man at the wedding of his friend Baldy (Karl Maka) and his much put upon girlfriend (Sylvia Chang). Sam manages to botch up the wedding much to the displeasure of Sylvia. Of course, Sylvia often has a good reason to be angry with the both of them.

The Mafia still hasn't given up and now sends another professional killer to HK. He is called Filthy Harry (but dresses more like the Eastwood character from his Westerns) or Black Glove (brother of White Glove) and his agent - Henry Kissinger! – gives him his assignment - kill both Hui and Maka.

The plot just gets sillier and sillier – and is often just an excuse for some great stunts. There is a car chase that is quite amazing as at one point a car does a backward jump over another car and then later gets split in two by a pole with Hui driving in one section and Maka riding in the other – and both sections continue to roll on.

Throw into this Yasuaki Kurata (brother of the damsel in distress) who forces Hui and Maka to help him in his evil doings by tying a bomb around each of them. One of the sweeter moments in the film is when Maka can't disengage the bomb and it looks like final curtains for him – and Sylvia stays at his side holding him – leading Maka to admit he loves her.

Both Tsui Hark and Walter Cho show up again in this film – Cho again as the police captain (as he also is in the Lucky Star series) and Tsui as a loony mental patient who thinks he is an FBI agent. There are some inspired moments in this film – the stunts, a fabulous brawl in a nightclub that demolishes the place, the crazy little robots – and of course always Sylvia – but for me the in between moments and comedy never quite click. (by Brian from View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Aces Go Places III (Hong Kong, 1984: Tsui Hark )** - As the beginning of *Aces Go Places III* begins, King Kong (Sam Hui) is once again up to his eyeballs in dames and danger. He is soon on top of the Eiffel Tower fighting Jaws (Richard Kiel) and Oddjob (Harold Sakata) in quite a nifty sequence as Sam jumps from beam to beam and finally parachutes off of it.

Though the two previous Aces films had certain elements of the James Bond films, this one goes much further – and also incorporates aspects of *Mission Impossible* (Peter Graves has a cameo). Though a lot of this is quite enjoyable and contains some great chase scenes, it is somewhat detrimental to the main strength of this series – the chemistry between the three main characters. It is really the fine balance of antagonism and friendship between them that give the films a solid basis and a great deal of heart. As much fun as the stunts and action can be, without the grounding of the threesome, they would be much less effective. Here though in an apparent play for an international audience, the action, stunts and gadgets are put first and the chemistry is pushed a bit into the background.

This is not to say that this film does not contain a number of pleasures within – the stunts are quite fun and some of the comedy (such as Karl Maka getting his tie stuck in the zipper of a woman's dress or having Sam turn the tables on Karl during a lie detector test) are enjoyable skits. Still the film seems to be lacking the energy and inspiration of the two first films in the series. Since Tsui Hark is directing this sequel it is somewhat surprising because Tsui is a master of creating emotional bonds between his characters, but here he seems to be more caught up in the gadgets and the toys he gets to play with.

Taking place a few years after the ending of *Aces II* (Karl Maka and Sylvia Chang are now married and have produced Junior – who is as bald as his father!), Sam is once again scammed by a beautiful woman and a gentleman who passes himself off as a British agent (sort of a Sean Connery lookalike). He is told that the Queen's crown has been stolen and that he needs to steal some jewels for her. Pretty weak – but it does create the opportunity for two great robberies.

In one Sam breaks into the police evidence room (after establishing a brilliant alibi) and escapes on a motorized skateboard across the tops of cars. In the other theft, a group of Santa Clauses steal a diamond, fly through the glass skylight and then ride motorcycles off the building. Sam escapes on a motorized hang glider that goes into the HK

subway system - with Maka holding on for dear life. Sylvia and Karl are assigned to find the thieves and have to go after their friend. Also making an appearance are Ricky Hui, Walter Cho and John Sham. (by Brian from View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Aces Go Places IV (Hong Kong, 1986: Ringo Lam)** - About three-quarters of the way through this film, I suddenly thought to myself – “where did the comedy go?” All of a sudden I realized that this fourth installment had turned into a fairly tense and violent action film and that the comedy was merely an echo of a whisper of long ago. Of course, when you take into account that the director is Ringo Lam this begins to make some sense.

Lam has a subversive streak in him and likes to turn films a bit upside down from the audiences expectations. This was only his fourth film, but in his earlier *Esprit D'Amour* he converts the basic ghost/love story into a harrowing tragic piece and in *Cupid Love* he begins with a screwball comedy that slowly morphs into a surprisingly uncomfortable film.

This one begins in typical *Aces* fashion with an action set piece featuring Sam Hui, then contains a few amusing moments – but after a while Lam drops all pretenses of making a comedy and turns it into a straight dramatic action film – full of chases and shoot outs. At the same time though, Lam really focuses again on the friendship between the three main characters (and now Baldy Junior as well!), but in a much more intense manner than in the previous films. There are a few scenes that are quite gripping and would have felt very out of place in the earlier films – one of Sylvia Chang fighting to get her son away from two hoodlums becomes an angst filled nightmare of motherly love. The other is when it appears that Baldy (Karl Maka) has been killed and Sylvia goes into catatonic shock and Sam goes crazy with a need to kill and gain revenge. It's actually powerful stuff and having fine actors like Sam and Sylvia allow Lam to do this. This film may not appeal to many *Aces Go Places* fans – but I quite liked it.

In New Zealand, a scientist (Roy Chiao) and his daughter (Sally Yeh) are performing an experiment on Sam Hui that will give a man superpowers. But before the experiment can get very far, a group of Nazis break into the installation and kill Chiao. Before he dies though he makes Sam promise to take care of Sally. So the two of them escape with the essential component in their possession and head back to HK (after a fabulous boat/helicopter chase) with the bad guys in close pursuit.

Sam of course brings in his friends Karl and Sylvia to help out and after an ice hockey game (is there anything these two can't do?) and another chase (in which Maka excels), the film gets serious. Two giant hoodlums show up at Maka's apartment – try and grab Junior – Sylvia intervenes and gets brutally beaten up – the kid escapes to the roof top – and falls off. This is another one of those – how did they do that scene? Junior who can't be more than four years old has a few amazing moments of hanging on and then falling down and getting snagged on something and then falling down some more. Even though you know what you are seeing can't be real, you still have to hold your breath.

Sylvia is kidnapped and taken back to New Zealand and the three boys and Sally are soon on their way as well. This leads to a terrific car chase (good practice for Lam's later films!) and then finally their entry into the lair of the Nazis. Soon all hell breaks out and as many guys are mowed down as in your typical Heroic Bloodshed film.

It's an interesting film and since Maka wrote the script and acts in it, he must have concurred with the darker territory that Lam takes it into. It certainly was a good stepping stone for Lam who was to follow this film in the following year with his classic film - *City on Fire*. There are some nice cameos from some great older stars – Walter Cho as usual shows up and Shek Kin and Kwan Tak-hing play the opposing ice hockey coaches! (by Brian from View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Aces Go Places V: The Terracotta Hit (Hong Kong, 1989: Lau Kar-Leung) – aka *Mad Mission 5*** - There's a distinct feeling with the fifth instalment of the *Aces Go Places* series, that the producers we're trying to aim for as broader audience as possible. Of course, fans of the series would welcome another entry, especially after Eric Tsang, the director of the original and its sequel, unsuccessfully attempted a crossover with the 'Lucky Stars' series in 1986's *Lucky Stars Go Places*. While that movie did give us Sammo Hung, it came minus the main star of *Aces Go Places*, with the notable absence of Sam Hui. For the fifth entry (technically sixth), Hui is back, however this time you also have Lau Kar Leung in the director's chair, guaranteed to bring in the kung fu movie fan base, and Hong Kong megastar Leslie Cheung thrown into the mix as well, here at the height of his popularity.

The decision to put Kar Leung in the director's chair was an interesting one, as all of the previous entries in the series had been sold upon the promise of comedy and increasingly elaborate stunts. The third and fourth

instalments were directed by Tsui Hark and Ringo Lam respectively, made at a time when both directors were coming into their own. Kar Leung on the other hand was quite the opposite, being an established Shaw Brothers director, now trying to find his way without the studio. What it certainly did mean though, is that we could expect less of the stunt work, and a shift in focus to an increase in fight scenes.

For anyone not familiar, the *Aces Go Places* series focuses on the comedic exploits of Sam Hui, who plays a kung fu expert master thief, and Karl Maka, who plays his bumbling detective sidekick. Billed as parodies of the James Bond series, the third instalment even featured Richard Kiel, who played Jaws in *The Spy Who Loved Me* and *Moonraker*, and Sean Connery lookalike Jean Mersant in the role of 007 himself. The first 'Aces Go Places' was released in 1982, with sequels released in '83, '84, and '86. *The Terracotta Hit* marked the longest period that fans had to wait for a new helping of Hui and Maka's shenanigans. However despite Hui's return, cast regular Sylvia Chang, who played Maka's long suffering wife, is missing, explained in the movie as having immigrated to Canada with their son. It's worth mentioning that *The Terracotta Hit* would be the last in the series, notwithstanding a poorly received reboot, with Chin Ka Lok's '97 *Aces Go Places*, that attempted to replace Hui and Maka with Alan Tam and Tony Leung Chiu-wai.

After directing Jet Li in the Mainland wushu epic *Martial Arts of Shaolin* in 1986, Lau Kar Leung would try several attempts at directing modern day action, first of all with *Tiger on the Beat* in 1988, and *The Terracotta Hit* would follow a year later. Several cast members from *Tiger on the Beat* return here, notably Nina Li Chi and Conan Lee. After the treatment Li Chi suffers in *Tiger on the Beat*, senselessly beaten at the hands of Chow Yun Fat, it's a surprise that she agreed to star in another Lau Kar Leung movie just a year later. However perhaps it has something to do with the fact that she met her husband to be, the previously mentioned Jet Li, on the set of *Dragon Fight* during the same year. I like to think that Li told her he'd beat seven bells out of Kar Leung if she had to suffer such a scene again. He probably didn't though.

The inclusion of Conan Lee is also a curious one (his character is hilariously called 'Chinese Rambo'), as despite his reputation of being extremely arrogant and difficult to work with, Kar Leung worked with him more than any other director. The two would team up again the following year, for a sequel to 'Tiger on the Beat', in which he famously falls from the top of a streetlight in a stunt gone wrong. For the kung fu fans out there, the cast also includes Billy Chong as a nameless thug in his last Hong Kong movie appearance (a whole 6 years after 'A Fistful of Talons', so his appearance is random to say the least), Melvin Wong as a villainous thief, wushu champion Lu Yan (she was one of the Beijing Wushu Team that performed on the White House lawns for Nixon, along with Jet Li), and a who's who of gweilos, including Mark Houghton, Bruce Fontaine, and Wayne Archer.

The plot itself sees Hui and Maka down on their luck, disowned by the police and living separate lives. Leslie Cheung and Nina Li Chi, playing sibling burglars, partially intercept a villainous groups attempt to steal the terracotta warriors, and to ensure the cops are thrown off the trail, they disguise themselves to look like Hui and Maka, framing them for a crime they didn't commit. Ending up in possession of the Chinese Excalibur (seriously), events culminate in both the 'old Aces' (Hui and Maka) and the 'new Aces' (Cheung and Li Chi) being hired by the Chinese government to retrieve the stolen warriors, and return them to China.

The tone of 'The Terracotta Hit' tends to veer a little all over the place. At times it goes for out and out comedy, particularly with the introduction of the main villain – a foreign devil played by Brad Kerner who is constantly seen stroking a white cat, until it's revealed to actually be a hand puppet (which he never takes off!) However when our four Aces see themselves thrown into a prison on the Mainland, which is basically a death camp, the comedy simply doesn't work in such oppressive surroundings, which includes Danny Lee in a bizarre cameo as a prisoner about to fulfil his death sentence. When it does work though, it's on point, such as Sam's office/living area, which contains a wrestling ring as a bed and a phone made out of Lego, oh, and of course – Chinese Rambo.

As expected, the vehicular stunt mayhem that was so prevalent in the earlier instalments is missing from the *Aces Go Places* swansong, instead relying on the physical talents of its cast. For the most part, the action delivers, and comes frequently enough to remain entertained. When Conan Lee initially visits Hui in his office, believing him to be behind the theft of the warriors, the two engage in a Jackie Chan style sequence of Hui attempting to weave in and out the various nooks and crannies of the area, with Lee in hot pursuit. There's some nice falls involved, with Hui being sent crashing through every table available, and the whole place ending up completely trashed. In another, Lu Yan challenges the four Aces in a restaurant that, if they can beat her using western fencing against her Chinese sword, they don't have to help the Chinese authorities, which leads into a playful but well-choreographed four-on-one east vs west sword dual.

The action is choreographed by Kar Leung's brother, Lau Kar Wing, well known for his roles and action choreography alongside Sammo Hung in such classics as *Dirty Tiger*, *Crazy Frog* and *The Odd Couple*, and while none



of the leads are real martial artists, he does a fantastic job. Of course in saying that, just about all of the villains who have been cast are martial artists, or are at least well known for their screen fighting prowess, so when events build up to a finale that sees everyone converge in a warehouse storing the stolen warriors, Kar Wing delivers. The scene unfolds as a large group melee, with the added comedy of numerous warriors actually being villains in disguise.

Amongst the chaos, it's Hui that looks the most legit, going toe-to-toe with both Billy Chong and Mark Houghton, before ending up armed with a Wing Chun Butterfly Sword in one hand, and a pair of nunchucks in the other. His performance could almost be considered a warm up for his role in 'The Dragon from Russia' made the following year. There's also a certain influence of the finale from *Dragons Forever*, released a year earlier, with stuntmen delivering some painful falls from elevated platforms to the ground below. Maka, Cheung, and Li Chi also get their licks in, with Li Chi's retrieval of the sword resulting in one of the laugh out loud moments of the movie.

Despite the strength of the fight action, by the end it's understandable why it would become the last in the series. The chemistry from the earlier movies isn't quite there, Cheung and Li Chi are welcome additions, but again don't really feel like they belong in an *Aces Go Places* movie, and Lau Kar Leung proves once more that he wasn't best suited to modern day action comedies. As a time capsule of 1989 Hong Kong though, it has undeniable nostalgia value, back in the days when the Mainland was treated as one large mass of country bumpkins. Ironically, scenes that are played for comedy here, such as Conan Lee accidentally revealing a full back tattoo declaring his love for China, would have comparatively similar scenes played completely poker faced 25 years later in the likes of 'Wolf Warrior'. A sign of changing times, but if you're after a slice of unpretentious 80's HK action comedy hijinks, you can certainly do a lot worse than 'The Terracotta Hit'. (by Paul Bramhall)

**Adventurous Treasure Island (Taiwan, 1996: Herman Yau)** - Obnoxious fat brat Chu Si Ting (Kok Siu-Man) is so hyperactive and annoying even his family can't stand him, although the plot implies his gambling addict mom (Fang Fang) and dad (Ng Man Tat) should be nicer. He is also bullied at school both by his peers and his long-suffering teacher (Emily Kwan), though that might be because he accused her of felling the principal. Ting seeks solace from his troubles by playing video-games at which he is quite adept. One night he discovers a strange glowing game cartridge floating in Hong Kong harbour. As soon as Ting plugs the game into his console water bursts forth from his TV set before he and his science geek older brother Si Man (Ng Ga-Lok) are sucked into a madcap multicoloured fantasy island. Beautiful beach babe Siu Sin (Vivian Hsu) saves Man from drowning while Ting bounces into Siu-Lone (Sik Siu-Lung), a flying boy with supernatural kung fu skills locked in battle with dastardly pirate Captain Hook (Jackson Lau Hok-Yin).

Chubby child actor Kok Siu-Man, martial arts prodigy Sik Siu-Lung and teen idol Vivian Hsu found stardom with *Shaolin Popeye* (1994), Taiwanese schlockmeister Chu Yen Ping's kung fu kiddie comedy which was a smash hit across Asia spawning several sequels and imitators. Seeking to get in on the children's film market, cinematographer turned Category III sleaze-meister Herman Yau reunited the Popeye gang for this silly, slapdash juvenile adventure. *Adventurous Treasure Island* proved the first of several family friendly outings that gradually drew the director of dubious fare like *Ebola Syndrome* (1995) and *The Untold Story* (1993) down the path towards mainstream respectability with a run of dramas, romantic comedies and acclaimed period films such as *The Woman Knight of Mirror Lake* (2011). Everyone knows Hong Kong cinema is pretty shameless when it comes to recycling Hollywood hits – though in recent years, that trend has reversed – but often those influences manifest in eccentric ways. Hence, *Adventurous Treasure Island* lifts its title from a certain Robert Louis Stevenson novel, steals a set-up from *Tron* (1982) but co-opts plot motifs from *Hook* (1991). In fact Yau goes so far as to re-stage several key scenes from the Steven Spielberg film with Si Man costumed to resemble Robin Williams' hapless Peter Banning and Siu-Lone an obvious, albeit charmless, stand-in for J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan. And Captain Hook is of course, Captain Hook.

As happens in *Hook* the plot centres on a neglected child who ends up with a band of fun-loving pirates as a foster family, unaware he is being duped. Captain Hook has little trouble in convincing dim little Ting he is the good guy in this scenario. Whereupon the portly tyke ends up using his frankly ill-defined videogame talents to give Hook the upper hand in his war against Siu-Lone. The film's chief liability is the shrill performance of Kok Siu-Man who renders Ting an uncommonly unsympathetic victim of bullying and neglect. Whether siding with the pirates or belatedly allying with the good guys, he shrieks, whines and generally enjoys bossing everyone around. Eventually the entire Chu family end up imprisoned in the game but Ting's parents' tearful apologies soon lapse into an argument over who behaved worse as the brat goads mom and dad into beating each other up. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Sik Siu-Lung is a remarkably gifted martial artist but no great shakes as an actor. His glowering, one-note character proves no more engaging. Only Vivian Hsu emerges a fairly sweet, likeable character though even she gets bogged down in a shrill romance with the annoying Si Man.

Co-directing with Ha Sau-Hin, who made the women-in-a-haunted prison trash favourite Jail House Eros (1991), Yau gives the film a lively, engaging colour palette with ingenious set design and lighting making the most out of the low budget. However the film is swamped in a sickly selection of saccharine Cantopop tunes that play non-stop throughout and often drown out the admittedly inane dialogue. Yuen Bun choreographed the wire fu action which although regrettably sparse is fairly decent particularly towards the chaotic climax. The film also sets some kind of perverse record for most gratuitous use of the word "bastard" in a kids' movie. (by Andrew Pragasam of The Spinning Image)

**All for the Winner (Hong Kong, 1990: Jeff Lau, Corey Yuen)** -This is the first time Corey Yuen and Jeff Lau had codirected together and their division of duties is obvious with Yuen on action and Lau on comedy. While both directors and star Stephen Chow had moderate successes before they had nothing as large compared to this. While its inspiration *God of Gamblers* was a massive hit, this pseudo-parody out-grossed it. This had to be a complete surprise to everyone involved. It was Chow's superstar breakout role, it helped push the popularity of his pairing with Ng Man-tat (they first worked together earlier that year in *Lung Fung Restaurant*), it furthered the current gambling film craze with *God of Gamblers II* (1990) being next in this series directed by Wong Jing, who actually liked this film, and it started a trend of Chow playing a Mainland bumpkin with a special ability.

Stephen Chow is Sing from Guangzhou who is to stay with his Uncle Blackie Tat (Ng Man-tat; who is also in *God of Gamblers*). He is so out-of-place he tries to buy soda with the wrong currency (RMB.) His suit would be rejected by Elmer Gantry. But besides his fighting skills he has a special power, he can see through things with a twinkle in his eyes. This was misused in Guangzhou where he was employed to look for pipe leaks, then as a customs officer. He was replaced by a machine.\* He has a few other powers: one quite powerful where he can modify what is shown on a card/ticket, but that one drains him of all his powers for a period of time so he cannot use that one too much. But he has a big heart and is known as the Saint of Gamblers (also the Chinese title 賭神 for the film.)

Of course he is going to be used for his ability much like the Andy Lau and Chow Yun-fat relationship in *God of Gamblers*. Alongside Blackie Tat there are three brethren living together: Ying (Sheila Chan) who wants Tat, Shing (co-director Corey Yuen) who wants Ping, and Ping (Sandra Ng) who wants a bigger chest and/or smaller butt. A pretty amiable group who is going to benefit from Sing's abilities. And also like in *God of Gamblers* those two are going to start small. They even show a clip from *God of Gamblers* and Tat wants Sing to use copious amounts of gel and walk like Ko Chun (or at least Chow Yun-fat). Sing takes this literally and hilariously enters a gambling event moving in slow motion (compare this to a later gag with Jim Carrey in *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* (1994).) Meanwhile Sing falls in love with a female triad assassin Yee Mong (Sharla Cheung, yes she is in *God of Gamblers*) who is working for Hung Kwong the King of Gamblers who is handicapped, has to use a voice box, but is a consummate gambler and a crime boss. Hung wants Sing on his side, but so does Taiwanese triad member Chan (co-director Jeff Lau.)

Some of the gags did not quite work for me. The armpit gag with Sandra Ng went on too long, though its absurdity was bizarrely interesting and is memorable since it means Sing is at minimum partially insane. The dry-humping of Uncle Tat joke also wore a little thin or at least wore Tat a little thin. The gambling scenes were not as well done as in *God of Gamblers* (which was often a shot-by-shot homage of *The Cincinnati Kid* (1965).) But the worst is some of the melodrama which is mostly time-filler and often feels off-balance with the ludicrous humor. Sometimes it is pretty stupid in a way such as Sing's possibly leaving (we know he is going to come back) a contest he has to be in. He pretty much condemns his uncle to being killed or at least castrated with a hammer (not knife) if he does not show up.

But this is Stephen Chow and I tend to be a fan of his *moleitau* (nonsense) humor\*\* which has such brilliant scenes from a triad boss who will not look a person in the face, to his Bruce Lee imitations which are in nice form and he is a decent on screen fighter. Chow has a great way of breaking a serious moment with a joke like a towel covering his head after a fight and he likes to use counterpoint such as when a litter accusation at Sing is shown at the same time as Tat spitting a loogie on the ground or use misdirection like when you think he is going to obviously cheat but instead scratches his nether regions in full view of the "cheating" cameras.

I overall liked Corey Yuen's fighting and action scenes. But analogous to *Bodyguard from Beijing* (1994) and *High Risk* (1995) he often has issues with his gun battles like the protagonists avoiding bullets too easily and I do wonder how a couch can be used to shield oneself from a barrage of bullets from a short range. But he works well with the hand fighting scenes, makes Chow look good and Ng Man-tat even sillier with his unique style of fighting.

For those who are Stephen Chow fans I imagine this has already been seen. Those who dislike Chow are not going to be converted here. Those new to Chow might better be served by seeing *Kung Fu Hustle* or *Shaolin Soccer* first. But for those interested in Hong Kong cinema this is a landmark film that needs to be watched. Repeated watches make me realize how much of a hodge-podge plot it is. It is not quite up there with

my favorite Chows like *From Beijing With Love* (1994), *Love on Delivery* (1994) or *Kung Fu Hustle* but I do enjoy this.

This was viewed on the Mei Ah 99m R0/NTSC release (be warned there is a shorter version available.) It is anamorphic widescreen, has Cantonese (Original, Dolby Digital Surround 5.1, DTS) and Mandarin (Original) audio tracks while subtitles are Traditional Chinese, Simplified Chinese and English. The subtitles are not bad and the print looks good. Special Features are a Trailer (3:02m), Data Bank (which is Synopsis and Cast & Crew in Chinese and English), and Best Buy which is a 2046 trailer (2:24m).

\* Obviously a dig at the Mainland, but there several in this film ("How about insect fighting?" "You think this is China?") and throughout much of Chow's Hong Kong oeuvre. The obvious connotation that even with his gifts they cannot find a good job for him (or in Marxist thought they cannot exploit him properly.)

\*\* He often uses Cantonese slang (as well as curse words) for some of his humor. A bad translation and some/all of it will be missed. But it is not as hard to understand as some reviewers/writers have stated since penis and poop idiomatic references are usually not as hard to understand as topical humor (for me like understanding the then current English political jokes in *Monty Python's Flying Circus*). Slang is also temporal, it rarely lasts long in the local lexicon. But Chow uses visual humor, absurdity, some topical jokes like Bruce Lee that would not be hard for most viewers especially here to understand, and scatological humor that translates rather easily (a fart joke is a fart joke). (by Masterofoneinchpunch of KFF)

**Angel (Hong Kong, 1987: Teresa Woo) - aka *Midnite Angels*; *Iron Angels*** - The angels (Lui and Lee) investigate a drug smuggling group.

*Angel* is one of the landmark films in HK history that put females into powerful roles in a modern setting. It has inspired countless other low budget femme-fatale flicks (some very trashy), many with Lee and Oshima as well, but *Angel 1* is the least campy one I've seen so far. It's not action packed, but there are four highlights; one very short scene between Oshima and Hwang, two fights between Hwang and Hideki Saijo, and the awesome finale with Moon Lee going against Oshima. While this isn't much, the scenes had high enough quality to satisfy me.

Oshima and Hwang have an 8 second exchange during a meeting. All kicks! Hwang's menacing, and it's a wonder he didn't appear in many other modern HK flicks. Amazing speed and power, and he doesn't hold back. Oshima holds her own and does chain kicks perfectly.

Oshima has a less enthralling bout against Elaine Lui (who looks all too uncomfortable in that ridiculous outfit) and then Alex Fong. Lui never makes it to flex her muscles in *Angel*, which is unfortunate. Oshima does the impressive stuff; high kicks, an arial, and being generally tough.

In the middle of *Angel* is a violent shootout with stunts in every direction. People get hit by cars, crash through glass into painful falls, and basically die a lot. Moon Lee makes her presence huge, and she looks better shooting a gun than anyone else. The scene is more stylish than the generic gun fights that plague the dozens of other *Angel* films. David Chiang seems to have fully retired from fighting by this time (luckily), and instead flies a helicopter around.

Hwang's second fight is one of the best parts of *Angel*. He goes against Hideki Saijo, who can do a bit of good fighting, just enough to let Hwang show off. The kicks are great, and the composition of the scene itself is solid modern kickboxing. A good amount of shots are cut together perfectly, and some heavy stuntwork is involved, such as Hwang's character being thrown through a windshield. Another nice part is where Saijo hops onto the hood of a car, Hwang sweeps and the he (his double?) does a side flip off and continues fighting. Great!! Wish it were more than a half minute long, but as it is it's fantastic.

Much later into the story Hwang has a shorter fight against Saijo again. There isn't a lot here, but again the mighty Hwang shines. His kicks aren't as pronounced here due to editing and shot cutting, but the action carries itself just fine. The high point is a single shot of crisp handwork (last pic). Unfortunately this is the last scene for Hwang, but viewers will appreciate what happens to him.

Moon Lee and Elaine Lui take out the final battalion of stuntmen. Lui, once again, does very little and eventually is thrown violently into boxes. Lee is a machine and rips through the whole room, proving she's just as good as top male fighters. She does some kickboxing, grabs a staff and slams everyone with that, and as a gag by the director Teresa Woo, Moon begins ripping the buttons off her shirt and tossing them onto the ground where they explode, sending six men into the air (without the use of air-rams, though; some of them jump way too late). Her final showdown against Oshima is one of the best fights I've ever seen from them. Moon's so fast and powerful that

doubling her actually produces worse results. Some shots they use this for an arial kick or a flip of some kind (done tastefully), but all things considered, Moon and Oshima are vicious, and the doubling isn't necessary. Every shot has adrenaline pumping madly, and it helps even more that the two ACT while they go at it. There's even some heavy prop usage towards the end where Oshima wields a plank with nails and Moon, a vacuum hose it seems. This is the highlight of *Angel* (Hwang's part comes close). It isn't that long (as expected), but you should be bobbing around in your seat after it's done.

*Angel* has been credited over and over as the pioneer girls-with-guns film. For that I think it deserves a lot of respect. There isn't any blatant sexism, and the women, for once, get the spotlight, and Hwang shares it fairly without completely stealing it. The finale is a great example of what Moon and Oshima are capable of. This has officially put me on the girls-with-guns track, though I loathe the films that will be almost the opposite of *Angel*; the ones with the senseless nudity, strippers, and five minute long rape scenes. See *Angel* to understand how great these highly talented female fighter-actors really are. With MORE action, this could be at the top. Quality high, quantity low. (by Eric Jacobus of the Stunt People)

**Angel 2 (Hong Kong, 1988: Teresa Woo) – aka *Midnite Angels 2*; *Iron Angels 2*** - The 'Girls with Guns' genre is generally considered to have been kicked off by the 1985 Corey Yuen movie *Yes, Madam!*, which introduced us to the femme fatale coupling of Michelle Yeoh and Cynthia Rothrock. The rest of the 80s were spent introducing us to a bevy of dangerous ladies – in 1986 we were given the ferocious pairing of Moon Lee and Yukari Oshima in *Iron Angels*, and in 1987 we were given yet another deadly duo with Cynthia Khan and Michiko Nishiwaki in *In the Line of Duty 3*.

Despite the talent of these ladies, the genre arguably always remained a tier below the output from their male counterparts. As time went on the action seemed to increasingly move to countries which had cheaper production costs, such as the Philippines and Malaysia, and by the mid-90s the 'Girls with Guns' genre had all but disappeared. For the few glorious years that these movies were getting produced though, the sheer number that got cranked out pretty much guaranteed at least a few minor classics. Often filled with copious machine gun fire and cheap and cheerful pyrotechnics, interspersed with moments of intense fight action, it's easy to see why these kick ass gals gained a sizable following.

The original 'Iron Angels' delivered a strong cast, apart from the aforementioned Moon Lee and Yukari Oshima, they were ably backed up by Alex Fong, Elaine Lui, and Shaw Brothers legend David Chiang, who essentially filled the role of Charlie in a Hong Kong version of *Charlie's Angels*. Throw in Japanese star Saijo Hideki and Korean boot master Hwang Jang-lee, and it would be difficult not to have a good time. The movie is considered a classic of the 'Girls with Guns' genre, and spawned two sequels, the second of which has frustratingly yet to be released on DVD in any English speaking country.

It's a shame, as while *Iron Angels 2* is hardly a contender for an Oscar, it is a worthy addition to the genre. The three principal members of the original return in the form of Moon Lee, Elaine Lui, and Alex Fong, who essentially make up the team of angels. Why one of the angels has to be played by a guy is anyone's guess, but in the pantheon of questions that could be raised out of Hong Kong's movie output from the 80's, this is probably one of the lesser ones.

The story concerns the angels being distracted from their holiday in Kuala Lumpur, when the host with whom they're staying turns out to be an insane revolutionary. This is revealed in a wonderful speech when he explains that he wants to make "an Asia for the Asians", and we get to see him kick back in the evening with a whiskey on the rocks, while watching videos of Hitler parading through the streets of Germany. Of course in an effort to flesh out the plot a little bit more, Elaine Lui becomes romantically involved with him, unaware of his extreme ideals, and if that wasn't enough to push the run-time to a suitable length, the rest is padded out by travelogue like shots of Kuala Lumpur city.

While 'Iron Angels' was hardly a big budget affair, it did get by on the merits of having a pair of strong adversaries in the form of Yukari Oshima and Hwang Jang-lee. Oshima seemed to relish her role of the vicious gang boss, and the whole movie stayed true to its genre origins by having Moon Lee and Elaine Lui ultimately have to rescue the captured Fong from her lair.

The sequel loses points somewhat in the fact that if anything, the shift in focus seems to be away from the ladies, and instead Fong is now the image of the macho 80's Hong Kong action hero, seemingly able to beat up anyone who crosses his path. After playing the deadly leading lady in the Shaw Brothers classic *Come Drink With Me*, Cheng

Pei Pei suffered a similar fate in its sequel *Golden Swallow*, when she played second fiddle to Jimmy Wang Yu. The only problem here is Alex Fong is no Jimmy Wang Yu, and director Stanley Tong is no Chang Cheh.

While I'm sure a more academically minded critic would be happy to draw comparisons between the notions of feminism between the original *Iron Angels* and its sequel, let's face it, at the end of the day we're all here for the action. Moon Lee would go on to make several movies together with Yukari Oshima, so the real question is how does she fare here with no promise of a final throw down with the Japanese beauty. Thankfully the answer isn't a disappointing one, in large part due to the showdown that she has with the movies action director Yuen Tak.

Tak is one of the more unsung heroes of Hong Kong action cinema. Originally cast as a kind of Jackie Chan clone in the 1980 Shaw Brothers movie *The Master* opposite Chen Kuan Tai, he went onto to have a successful career as an action director, working on such movies as *Dragon from Russia*, while still occasionally making onscreen appearances, most notably returning as the villain in the 1997 version of *Hero*. Here Tak serves as action director and plays the head henchman, who happens to face off against Lee in a munitions hut in the finale. While their fight is frustratingly brief, what's there is gold, as the two exchange a lightening fast flurry of feet and fists.

The fight is so good that it makes you realize that she's just spent the majority of the movie wasted in what for the most part is a non-action role, while it's Fong who gets given the majority of the movies action beats. While Fong is a passable screen fighter, the fight between Lee and Tak makes his scenes look like rehearsals. This is made even more glaringly obvious when straight after the showdown he's given the final confrontation of the movie, which while not particularly bad, simply doesn't stand up compared to the few seconds of excellence we've just bore witness to.

There's also a whole lot of obligatory but satisfying machine gun fire and explosions in the finale, but despite it all, 'Iron Angels 2' remains a notch under the original. Later that same year Lee would be seriously burnt when she was caught in an explosion, which detonated early while escaping from a building on the set of the movie 'Devil Hunters', but like the strong female characters she portrayed on screen, she didn't stay down for long. Hopefully movies like both *Devil Hunters* and *Iron Angels 2* will some day make it onto DVD, and everyone can enjoy watching the ladies of Hong Kong cinema kick just as much ass as the men. (by Paul Bramhall)

**Angel 3 (Hong Kong, 1989: Teresa Woo, Stanley Tong)** – aka *Iron Angels 3*, *Midnite Angels 3* - As *Wonder Woman* is wowing both critics and audiences, finally showing us that it is possible for Hollywood to do a superheroine movie right, let us reflect on just how hard it's been for Hollywood to get the whole female action thing right. With few exceptions, it's been *very* hard. Okay, done. Meanwhile, Hong Kong and Taiwan have been doing it with ease since the 60s, and maybe even longer. We got wuxia heroines played by like Josephine Siao and Cheng Pei Pei, and then kung fu heroines like Chia Ling, Angela Mao, Polly Shang Kuan Ling Feng, and more.

By 1983, things were changing. Period pieces were no longer bringing in the audiences like they used, unless they had some new state-of-the-art gimmick, like crazy whackadoo optical effects or giant ninjas who broke up into smaller ones. Audiences were more inclined to intense action-oriented comedies, like the combined works of Jackie Chan and Sammo Hung. They also liked John Woo-directed triad bullet ballets that made young kids forget about shaving their heads and joining Shaolin, and instead don trenchcoats, light dollar bills on fire, and join Triads. A lot of actors and fight choreographers who made a living with the old school kung fu movies had a hard time adapting and drifted into obscurity. But what about the women? Did the changes in audiences tastes mean that those powerful, butt-kicking members of the fair sex were also a thing of the past?

Hell no.

The "Girls n' Guns" sub-genre began in 1985 with Corey Yuen's *Yes, Madam!*, which introduced the world to former ballet dancer Michelle Yeoh and gwailo wushu champ Cynthia Rothrock. It was successful enough to get a sequel the following year, *Royal Warriors*, which has also become a classic of the genre. In 1987, female director Teresa Woo made a little film called *Angel*. It starred Yukari Oshima, a Japanese goju-ryu stylist who, until then, had mainly worked in Taiwan. It also featured Moon Lee, a Hong Kong singer/actress who hadn't much experience in action movies, but had recently been training with the second important "fei jai" of Hong Kong cinema, Tsui Siu-Ming. Rounding out the cast was Elaine Lui, up-and-coming actor Alex Fong, Shaw Brothers alumni David Chiang, and your friend and mine, Legendary Superkicker Hwang Jang Lee. The result was a fun little action romp with one of the best mano-a-mano female fights of the genre.

The next year, Teresa Woo rounded up Elaine, Moon and Alex and made a sequel, *Angel 2*. The film was a little inferior to the last one, until the last twenty minutes, when it goes all Rambo on us, culminating with a legendary

duel between Moon Lee, Chan Man-Ching and Yuen Tak. The fight choreographer was an up-and-coming stuntman named Stanley Tong, and whatever praise he garnered for his work here was channeled into his becoming "Executive Director" of tonight's film.

*Angel 3* begins with a Vietnamese diplomat arriving in Thailand for official business. The relationship between the two countries has apparently been strained, so the presence of the politician means that maybe they can start patching things up. Unfortunately, some terrorists appear and gun down the politician in cold blood. So much for improved relations.

At this point, Alex (a returning Alex Fong), who now runs the Angels, is contacted by the CIA and asked to help find out who's responsible for the killings. I always found it weird that Alex Fong's character is portrayed in *Angel 2* and *Angel 3* as being Moon Lee's equivalent to Charlie, since that function was filled by David Chiang in the first film. In *Angel*, Alex Fong was the Angels' CIA contact, so the switcharoo of his roles is sort of odd.

In any case, agent Moon (Lee) is dispatched to intercept a Japanese assassin who's been hired to join the assassins, who's run by a gawilo girl (Katy Hickman) and is apparently under orders from the late Moammar Khadaffi himself(!). I'm not sure why Khadaffi would be so interested in sewing discord in SE Asia, but this was made in the 80s, so maybe it's one of those ripped from the papers dealies. Moon joins the assassins, proving her merit by beating up the flunkies in two separate fights. She tries to sneak into her boss's study, but is caught and another fight breaks out, after which she escapes.

A few days later, there's a big party at the King of Thailand's mansion, attended by lots of foreign dignitaries. Suddenly, the place is invaded by dozens of motorcycle-driving assassins who start mowing down the guests with Uzis attached to the handlebars. A huge gun battle erupts between the Thai military and an army of assassins, with the latter outnumbering the former. Cue the arrival of Alex and Ralph, another male member of the team, who fly in on jet packs with Uzis mounted on them. May the unbelievable climax begin.

I know a lot of people consider this to be the least in the series, of which I'm inclined to agree. Part of it stems up from Teresa Woo's script, which unwisely treats the scenes with Moon and those with Alex almost as two separate movies. There's also some cutaways to a Libyan general (played by a white guy) who laughs maniacally and berates his black subordinate, but those two never interact with anybody else in the movie, so why were those scenes even included. I'm also convinced that Woo's script ended up in a rather short movie, because there's one sequence that goes on for a good 15 minutes in which Alex and Ralph go to muay thai match (you can't have a movie set in Thailand without one of those), and Alex ends up challenging one of the fighters, played by a young Panna Rittikrai. The entire movie stops just for that sequence, and it adds nothing to the film.

I think the part of the blame lands on Stanley Tong. I'm not sure, but as good a fight choreographer and stunt director the man is, he's really not that good of an action director. That is, I do not think the man makes good decisions when it comes to where to take the action and what to do with the action. Elaine Lui is absent from this film, which is unfortunate. But Kharina Isa, who played the machine gun-toting transsexual soldier in *Angel 2* is back. So what does she do in this movie? ABSOLUTELY NOTHING! Then why even include her in the movie?

And then there's the finale. Yes, it's bloody and violent with an exceedingly high body count, just the way we HK cinephiles like it. Sure, the jet pack-mounted Uzis never need reloading, but that's okay, since it's such a bizarre, James Bondian touch (more proof that Stanley Tong had more say in the action than frequent collaborator Dang Tak-Wing did) that we'll let it slide. But really, who goes to see a movie called *Angel 3* starring Moon Lee, only for her to disappear from the film prior to the climax and focus on Alex Fong and friggin' Ralph Chan? Nobody, that's who. We want to see Moon beat the hell out of Katy Hickman and then blow the back of her skull out with a large revolver, not Alex Fong. And sadly, this would be the first, but not the only time that Stanley Tong would botch a climax. See *Project S*, *China Strike Force* and *The Myth* for more examples.

That said, the fighting itself in the film is pretty good. Moon Lee is at her absolute best (like I said, Stanley Tong and his crew are great choreographers, even if he makes questionable decisions as a director) and the scene where she fights an army of blade-wielding killers with a pair of nunchaku is one of the best fights of her career. She gets in four fights, which are easily the highlights of the film. Alex Fong is pretty obviously not a trained fighter, as you can see from his Keanu Reeves-esque stiff moves and kicks that rarely go above stomach level. But Stanley Tong and Dang Tak-Wing choreograph him well enough that he keeps up a good rhythm in his fights. The final fight, while disappointing in conception, is enjoyable in execution as Fong wields a rapier against Hickman, who wields a curved knife that reminds me of *Die Hard with a Vengeance* and a Thai woman, who has a more conventional dagger. It's a very bloody fight, which is par for the course with these *Angel* films.

In closing, the film is perfectly entertaining if taken solely on its action merits. But as a Girls n' Guns film, its refusal to have a female heroine take part in the bullet-riddled final set piece knocks it down several rungs, even if the female-oriented action before it would've placed it near the very top. (by Blake Matthews)

**Angel Enforcers (Hong Kong, 1989: Godfrey Ho)** - Sharon Yeung is fairly amazing. I quite enjoy watching her on the screen - she has wonderfully strong athletic moves, but she is not as well known as some of the other femme fighters. This is partially due to the fact that her career fell to some degree in that empty period between the end of the kung fu film and the beginning of the "girls with guns" genre. She had some solid roles in both genres - but never made the impact in either that she could have considering her skills. Part of it may be her screen persona as well - she is usually intently serious and doesn't carry the light comedic charm that Moon or Yukari could muster. She is a fierce fighter though and has great athletic ability. Unfortunately, this film does not utilize those skills as well as they could have though she does have a few lovely moments.

The plot is very haphazard and confusing with one large side story - a kidnapping being completely forgotten about. The action is decent, but there is much less of it and it is much less over the top than in many of the other "girls with guns" films. It's one of those low budget types in which during a car shootout, though the car is hit about 50 times no glass is actually shattered. On the other hand, Sharon's ride on top of the racing van is impressive and the fall off even more so.

Basically, the film follows the efforts of four policewomen in trying to break up a gang of thieves. The four women are all related and very close - the heart of the family is Woo Fung - and they all report to Walter Cho. The best part of the film is when Dick Wei and Phillip Ko show up as professional killers trying to silence an undercover cop. They are pretty tough and Wei has a good fight when he takes on three of the cops and a couple other folks as well and pretty much beats the hell out of everyone. His character is fairly interesting as the killer with a strong sense of loyalty. Another interesting aspect of the film is that the head boss is a cross-dressing deadly female (Ha Chi-chun) who seems to prize her riding crop quite a lot.

The last twenty minutes has a few surprises and gets pretty intense, but overall this film was a bit of a letdown. Its does have a number of solid fights and a fun beginning when the the four women all beat up some guys and then whip off their cap to allow their long tresses to blow in the wind! (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Angel Mission (Hong Kong, 1990: Philip Ko Fei)** - Summarizing this film's plot will be a bit difficult, because this film has one of the most unfocused stories I've seen in a Hong Kong movie, which is saying a lot. Stuff just happens for the better part of 90 minutes, without having an actual main protagonist to follow throughout. The story is so slipshod and ramshackle that I'm pretty sure you'll forget what you just saw a few minutes after it's over.

Yukari Oshima plays a Japanese Interpol officer who's off to Hong Kong to look for some missing girls, whom we know are being sold into prostitution. We learn early on that her mother is one of the brothel madams—and incidentally, has a philandering "trophy" husband in the form of Lee Chun-Wah, the Bolo Yeung-esque fellow that played the cook in *The Drunken Master*. Oshima goes to Hong Kong and hooks up with a hot-tempered female cop, played by Ha Chi-Chun (aka Susan Hughes, whom I think was the treacherous Cambodian guerilla girl in *Eastern Condors*). Oshima just gets in random fights at regular intervals until the film is over.

Philip Ko Fei plays Crowbar, a top-ranking Triad enforcer who works for a Triad Boss (Chen Kuan-Tai) and who pines to be on top. The second half of the movie will focus largely on Crowbar's teaming up with a gang of Gwailos (led by Thomas Hudak, who'd go on to have roles in *Knock-Off* and *A Man Called Hero*) to help him off his boss and his most loyal followers.

Dick Wei plays some guy from Japan whose sister has been sold into prostitution. He joins the Triad and ends up taking on Crowbar after he finds out what became of his sister. He has little to do until the climax, when he storms Crowbar's new manor with a shotgun and starts blowing people away with reckless abandon. A side note: if you're a vicious Chinese triad who has just offed your boss and are now the leader of a powerful Triad dealing in white slavery and drugs, are you really going to celebrate by clapping your hands and singing, "For he's a jolly good fellow" while everybody play-dances with unattractive gwailo girls? Wouldn't you just send for hookers or strippers or porn stars or something?

Like I said, stuff just sort of happens for 90 minutes.

On the female fighting side of things, Yukari Oshima does get in several fight scenes, especially during the first half. When we meet her, she's teaching a karate class in Japan (did she do her own Japanese dubbing?) and she briefly fights one of her students. Then she beats up some of her mother's men who mistake her for a newbie prostitute, but that fight is ruined by close-ups and quick cuts. She gets a brief fight with Lee Chun-Wah, and then fights off some thugs in two other fight scenes that show off her superior over-the-shoulder kicks and whatnot. At that point, she sort of disappears from the movie until the end. She does get to fight Philip Ko Fei briefly, and the choreography is great, but the editing is horrendous. One moment the two are fighting, then we cut to Dick Wei in another part of the house killing one of Ko Fei's cronies in a rather silly death scene, and then we cut back to the other fight, only we cut to Ha Chi-Chun just blowing Ko Fei away with a revolver. Uh...where's the rest of the fight between Yukari and Philip?

I can't really recommend this movie. It's pretty terrible, although Yukari Oshima completists will surely enjoy her fights. I'd rather just watch *A Punch to Revenge* and *Angel* again instead. (By Blake Matthews)

**Angel of Vengeance (Taiwan, 1993: Liu Sung-Pai)** - This Taiwanese film is seriously compromised by a story line involving a female student who is writing a thesis on the sociology of prostitution. She goes undercover to gather data and is raped by a drunken customer, who is also a gang member and pimp. The lethal mixture of goofy comedy, bad taste and soft core porn scenes contrast unpleasantly with Yukari's brief appearances - which she plays straight, with considerable venom. Her change of facial expression on discovering her dying sister is chilling. Her acting is at least an arrow of sunlight into this murky territory. In a separate thread Yukari is one of two surviving daughters of a man killed by a rival gang. As an adult she returns to seek revenge and find her sister. The two plot threads converge in a brothel, as she discovers her sister was a prostitute murdered by the same man who raped the student. Yukari's fight scenes early in the movie are brief but excellent, with crisp, athletic form, and pole fighting with multiple opponents. There are several additional fight scenes, but the final confrontation is poorly planned, directed and filmed. Overall, the results are disjointed and unsatisfactory. Favorite line (Yukari): "No pain no gain." (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Angel on Fire (Phillipines, 1995: Philip Ko Fei)** - If you read reviews for this on the HKMDB and the now-defunct "View from the Brooklyn Bridge" website (whose owner, Brian, loved everything Girls n' Guns), you'll note that this is generally considered one of the low points of the sub-genre. I wouldn't go that far, having wasted three hours of my life watching Cynthia Khan's *Yes Madam* and *Yes Madam 5* (neither of which have anything to do with the Michelle Yeoh/Cynthia Rothrock classic). I know how dull and uninspired and tacky and horrible these films can get. This one is just sort of there. I think I liked it more after watching the nigh-incoherent *Angel Mission*, as this one at least had a more focused story.

A Filipino supermodel-cum-thief-cum-martial artist named May (Melanie Marquez) breaks into the Shaolin Temple to steal a priceless artifact, kicking the collective butts of all the monks training there. She escapes with the help of her partner Kao (Philip Ko Fei), although he quickly reveals his treachery by siding with another crime boss, Tony (Anthony Alonso), who sends his cronies (including Darren Shahnavi) to kill May and get the artifact. She narrowly escapes through the intervention of an Interpol agent whom we'll call Cynthia (Khan) because I didn't take notes on what the character's name is—and it really doesn't matter.

May flees to the Phillipines, with Cynthia and Kao in hot pursuit, to get protection from the crime boss she works for. However, she actually plans on double crossing *him* and selling the artifact without his knowing to a gwailo buyer (whose bodyguard is played by Mark Houghton). Cynthia Khan is able to keep tabs on her with the help of a kickboxing cabbie (Ronnie Rickets). All of this comes to head in a huge action sequence that takes up the last 25 minutes of the movie, composed of gunplay, fisticuffs, airplane chases, and random explosions. Seriously, the grenade launcher that the crime boss Tony uses must have a 25-round grenade clip, if it can cause as many successive explosions as it does.

Oh, Sharon Yeung Pan Pan shows up as a Mainland Cop who's assigned to the case, but she spends two or three scenes in the car of another agent, before miraculously showing up to the finale just in time for the fireworks factory.

There are two fights worth mentioning in this film. In the first one, Cynthia Khan takes on Philip Ko Fei and his men while trying to chase down May. It's not a great fight, but it's Cynthia's longest one in the film and she does some decent moves. Despite the modern setting, choreographer Ko Fei throws in some weird wire stunts into the mix, like Cynthia doing a *Once Upon a Time in China*-esque "No Shadow Kick" while supporting herself on a pole. Much



better is Sharon Yeung's fight with a muscular black guy named "Black Leopard" (played by Winston Ellis, who plays the mercenary that Dodo Cheng and company beat silly with helmets in *Operation Condor*). Yeung's moves don't suffer from any wire enhancement, and she's still fairly flexible at this point in her life. She does a nice cartwheel kick and a few other flashy moves, too.

This wasn't a great movie, but I found it watchable for the greater part of its brief 80-minute run time. Trust me, you could do a lot worse when it comes to Girls n' Guns films. (By Blake Matthews)

**Angel Terminators (Hong Kong, 1992: Wai Lit)** - Having watched the sequel earlier in the week, tonight I settled down and watched *Angel Terminators*. This may be a controversial opinion but I don't think it's as enjoyable as the second film. With that said, it's one hell of a ride and a great film. I have no idea Sharon Yeung Pan Pan was this good! She kills it in every single fight scene. I've never really paid attention to her until now.

Sadly, the fights are a bit on the brief side minus some earlier scuffles. Dick Wei gets about 90 seconds of solid fight action. Even the gwaillos get longer than that. Fun film though. I'm only just dipping my toes into the "girls with guns" sub genre and, so far, I'm loving it. Oh and the final scene deserves a mention. It's bloody bonkers. Thanks again to @NoKUNGFUforYU for his quality work. (by Drunken Monk of KFF)

**Angel Terminators 2 (Hong Kong, 1993: Tony Liu, Chan Lau)** - Thanks to @NoKUNGFUforYU I got to watch an amazingly beautiful copy of this, complete with subtitles. And, oh my, I loved every single minute of it. The plot is relatively simple (a group of friends get tied up in some gang-based naughtiness) but the action comes thick and fast. I haven't seen a lot of Yukari Oshima and Moon Lee stuff and I feel like this was an incredible place to start. The fights are fantastic. Both girls shine and even Sibelle Hu holds her own in places. The last fifteen minutes is a joy. It's nice to see Lo Lih act a bit silly too. I'm used to seeing him be crazy serious. REALLY enjoyed this one. I'm doing things a bit backwards as I plan to watch the first film next. Can't wait. (by Drunken Monk of KFF)

**Angels, The (Hong Kong, 1991: Woo Ga-Kan)** - Yukari has never looked better (or changed outfits as often) as in this police drama in which she is the principal star. Despite a very low budget and apparently being shot directly on videotape, the camera work and directing are really quite promising. Editing is crisp and the score is decent. For a change there are plenty of lengthy close-ups. Yukari sports the very short hair and masculine look that suit her so well. She plays an HK cop who tends to slap suspects around. By chance she meets a man and forms a relationship. In the meantime her sister has been framed for drug smuggling and arrested. Yukari discovers there is a romantic triangle. During a painfully awkward attempt at a love scene, Yukari is saved by an incoming fax message. She eventually discovers that the object of her affection is actually a drug dealer. This film is essentially a drama, with minimal action scenes. However, Yukari is very watchable! (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Angel's Project (Hong Kong, 1993: Cheung Ho-Tak)** - Two Hong Kong Police officers get involved in a treacherous plot led by a corrupt police official in Malaysia.

How this movie manages to turn into an adventure comedy and then eventually mold itself into a SWAT shoot-out against all odds is just baffling to me. Definitely one of the weakest Hong Kong movies I've watched recently, and not because of the fights. Everything else is simply atrocious. Moon Lee is also out of the story for way too long. @TibetanWhiteCrane you might have a point about how there's a progression between those GWG flicks. Once you reach a certain point, the bottom of the barrel points its ugly nose!

What about the fights?

The movie opens with a long fight and chase sequence involving characters that won't really be of much significance to the story. Narratively speaking it's quite terrible, but fighting-wise it's pretty good, simply because of its length.

Then it's a long while before any fighting occurs, but eventually it evolves into a clusterfuck of fighting in the streets between Moon Lee, Sibelle Hu, Benny Lai, and other villains. Pretty good sequence again, I'd say the best in the movie.

Moon Lee is then side-tracked until the end, so the rest of the fights for a while are skirmishes between Sibelle Hu, Benny Lai, and thugs. Eventually everyone dukes it out at the end but it's... kinda boring? I don't know how they managed that seeing the cast they had. This movie is simply not well-made.

#### Summary

Stunts - 82/100 | Those HK Girls with Guns flicks always have stunts ranging from pretty cool to batshit crazy. This falls in the "pretty cool" range, which means they're still good.

Narrative - 36/100 | There's a comedy sequence that, although legitimately funny for a while, really overstays its welcome. Even the relentless action can't salvage this.

Fight Choreography - 85/100 | Love the steady filming style, I just wish they spent more time on honing the intricacies of each fight. Still, the fights are pretty damn good compared to the rest.

Enjoyment - 30/100 | Another ridiculous "we have to find x" macguffin. By the end I was just waiting for it to end so yeah, not a good sign with those movies as I'm quite easy to please on this front. This movie pushed "mindless action" to a whole new level.

Moon Lee coming out of her hotel room wearing an oversized Garfield T-shirt was the real highlight here!

Aside from the fights, this movie really has nothing to offer. (by Daxtreme of KFF)

**Angry Ranger (Hong Kong, 1990: Johnny Wang Lung-Wei)** - Ben Lam (Pronounced "Lum") gets out of jail after being charged with murder and gets entangled with criminals and goes back to his old ways.

Since I'm sitting here with the CD in my computer, I decided to review this movie and show you why you should go find it. I found it (more like dug it up, the VCD shop used a sort of stacking method to shelf the movies) in Hong Kong and from the cover you wouldn't guess what it is. What this movie is is Ben Lam fighting everyone in the movie through maybe 10 fights, all choreographed by Jackie Chan during his Police Story days. What happens? Anyone who knows Ben Lam knows how the guy fights, he's fierce and his attacks are especially powerful. Whenever he throws a kick, it's a bolt of lightning that comes out of nowhere. To put it simply, every fight in this movie is immaculate. I could just say that, post a clip, and let you all see for yourselves, but it deserves more, so I'll go through each fight kind of quickly, and I'll give you a video to download as well. I imagine that this is about the only thorough review you'll ever find on Angry Ranger, so I'll also add that the acting was so-so and the story was very simple. Ben Lam's character is 2D all the way through, whenever he arrives you know he'll kick someone's @\$\$, and he has little dialogue. So as a movie it doesn't hold a coin to Police Story, but in terms of action I thought it was almost more satisfying, except with a different touch. The fights in this are almost all group fights (Ben Lam vs others, something in common with PS) except with more fighting and less huge stunts. A better example is a fight halfway through that is JUST a fight and no stuntwork is involved. So, I'll explain more in a while.

The first bout is a flashback, basically explaining Lam's life story. Blade fight, violent and bloody, Ben fighting about 5 others with his brother. Fast fighting and surprisingly long cuts, but it's hacking and slashing. Still stands out as a fast fight with a few falls by the stuntmen.

Ben Lam has his way with a gang in a restaurant and beats up everyone. All the hits look painful, lots of small stunts that look painful as well. Lam also throws in 2 or 3 lightning fast kicks with perfect form. Very cool, no extended fighting in this one but more bam bam bam throw stunt fighting. Non stop too with zero humor, Ben Lam is super intimidating with all his attacks snapping.

Ben Lam saves the day. His brother is being beaten in class (not by the teacher) and he comes to the door without saying much, the villain pulls out a knife and Ben dodges it with grace, beats him senseless and throws him out the door, literally. Short but still worth mentioning.

Yet another fight, still on the first CD. Lam takes a group in an alleyway, same deal again with Ben throwing more kicks this time. I think I spotted Benny Lai in there (he comes later), tons of painful falls and breaking through STUFF, and when you think it's over, Macau Hua (the character's name, dunno his real name) comes in and does something

you wouldn't expect; classical styles. He starts with what looks like phoenix eye (his hands say so, but what would I know?) fist, some nice attacks and the choreography is great, camera is great as well. Next he does the unthinkable, ... he flexes his pecs, and THEN does mantis, weird. Anyways, cool fight, check the clip to see what I mean, probably the one that makes this movie REALLY stand out on its own.

Ben and his brother are invaded in their apartment. Tons of stunts again, I think I see Lai once again, smashing a TV with a little axe. Even Ben's brother, who looks like a nobody in the film, does some stuntwork and tosses a few kicks and punches. I swear anyone in the movie is a stuntman, including Sun Chien. People breaking through glass, falling over tables, all the good stuff, like a fast version of the fight scene in the gang hangout in Rumble in the Bronx only 5 times better.

Sun Chien has a little training with his buddies, one of whom looks familiar, probably a Sing Ga Ban guy. One piece of editing was especially cool where he kicks onto the guy's shoulder, wraps his leg around his head and ends up with his foot against his neck... to understand, buy the movie.

The finale is brutal. Lam meets the gang at a circus, makes a bunch of confusion and beats them all. Big group fight with a ton of destruction, chairs flying, bamboo smashing into everyone, blades flying around, falls. Nothing ever lets up, at one second Ben is up in a scaffolding, he kicks everyone off except one who grabs him and throws him down, beats on him, Benny Lai and another join in and beat Ben, Ben fends them off and takes the original, smashes a box over his head, and Lai does his triple kick, only with 2 bike kicks and a final side kick to the head. Wired? I wonder, but it was great looking anyways. Lai keeps taking him, fast kickboxing, and then Lam takes Sun Chien. They beat each other senseless at blazing speeds, lots of throws, it's almost like a real fight between 2 incredibly fast people. Eventually Ben is able to kick Chien into the fire and that's the end of the story.

After watching this a second time I liked it even more. The finale was really good I think, but had they chosen a different location, like a warehouse, I bet it could have been even better. But what was in the movie was practically flawless. The people were actually reused for scenes. There was Macau Hau, and the same guy was used with a different outfit at night to do a murder, and I actually got confused but it was the same actor, different character. It's like there were no stuntmen, except these stuntmen, and they all did great. Just imagine Sing Ga Ban, choreographed by Jackie Chan and the rest of the group, all in one movie doing a bunch of fights with Ben Lam as the head actor. It's great. (by Eric Jacobus of the Stunt People)

**Armor of God (Hong Kong, 1987: Jackie Chan) – aka Operation Condor 2: The Armor of the Gods** - JC is the Asian Hawk, an adventurer who specializes in searching out relics. Having secured the sword of the Armor of God of which there are 5 pieces, he sells it at auction. May (LF) is the highest bidder as representative for her father who is a wealthy and powerful private collector and has 2 of the pieces of armor. But a cult with evil ideas has the other 2 and desire the entire set. They kidnap JC's former girlfriend, Lorelei (RK), with the intent of making JC trade the other 3 pieces for her freedom. Alan (AT) is JC's former friend and Lorelei's fiancé and he persuades the Asian Hawk to put aside the enmity between them and help rescue her. May tags along to keep guard of her father's interests.

Fight #1 --- JC vs a tribe of natives - This is the opening sequence and has some good bits in it. One of my faves is a double back-flip off of an idol into a crouching back sweep. Love that! This is mainly comedic, acrobatic bits with a little fighting interspersed into it. (This also contains the stunt of JC leaping into a treetop. The limb he grabs breaks and he falls to the rocky ground causing a head injury to the back of his skull. According to his autobiography, this halted production on the film for 6 months. It's also the reason his hair is grown out for the rest of the film where it was cut short for this sequence. I forget who it was but one of the execs or producers superstitiously thought the accident was due to Chan cutting his hair prior to production.)

Fight #2 --- JC vs cultists - This has a spat of fighting initially but segues into a car chase that showcases some cool stunts. 1 that especially blows my mind involves a jeep flying down some cobblestone steps and narrowly missing pedestrians.

Fight #3 --- JC vs cultists in the monastery mess hall - This is classic Chan, man!!!! Great fight! There's some good kicks here but what's really great is the fist combinations on display. The back fists are savage. The final 2 cultists go down in some amazing falls.

Fight #4 --- JC vs cultists in cavern chamber - This is short and really more of a segue-way but it's packed with great choreography including an aerial triple kick delivered on the run by JC.

Fight #5 --- JC vs 4 Amazons - This is so cool!!!!!! These chicks are like Donna Summer and the Pointer Sisters on steroids and high heels!!!! While they're obviously doubled in places, these girls are all talented MA's. Not only does JC take some good falls but everyone of these gals do, too. The best is when one of them leaps at JC off a catwalk. As she's about to land on him, he strikes out with a roundhouse kick to her legs and sends her into a forward flip to crash land face first. This whole sequence is a classic piece of film!(Could this be where the idea for all the transgendered villains/villainesses in Thai films are coming from?)

I love this movie. The pace is a bit hampered by the plot and lack of action in the middle. Chan is actually more serious there. The comedic Chan kicks in with the action. Still, there's lots of stunts here and it's hard to image coming back from the trauma of a head injury and doing the rest of this film. Unreal! But then.....he's Jackie Chan. Making our jaws drop in amazement is his thing. And he does it well. *GET THIS!!!!!!* (by Scott Blasingame)

**Armor of God 2: Operation Condor (Hong Kong, 1991: Jackie Chan) – aka Operation Condor** - JC, the Asian Hawk, is commissioned to find World War 2 Nazi gold that's hidden in the Sahara Desert in a secret base.

Fight #1 --- JC vs 2 Arab henchmen - It's short but there's some beautiful kicks: a crouching back sweep; a tornado kick; a crouching side kick. The flow is very smooth and casual.

Fight #2 --- The Big Chase - This starts off by JC being cornered outside by 2 toughs. He executes a cool low roundhouse kick to the back of 1 guy's knee followed by a snapping kick to the back of his head. This segues into a chase sequence with JC on a motorcycle. This chase through openly populated streets and alleys just blows my mind! (Though it's obvious that Chan isn't doing most of the cycle stunts here, it's still pretty cool.) There are so many near misses! At 1 point, JC drives into a warehouse and ditches his bike. He leaps up stacks of boxes as pursuing cars wipe them out. Finally, as he hangs from a metal overhead joist, he hauls himself up as a car ramps up and flies beneath him. (You can see the safety tether give him a jerk but it's still quite a dangerous stunt. I mean, the car barely misses him by a foot or two.) The chase culminates in a bike jump off a dock where he grabs a laden cargo net as the motorcycle and 2 cars sail out into the water.

Fight #3 --- JC vs 2 thugs in an Indian hotel - This is a good fight that's also a game of "keep away". The comedy doesn't really work all the time, sort of hits and misses, but the action pieces are solid. There's some good kicks here along with Chan's display of agility. (As seen in the outtakes, JC takes a kick to the throat during the filming.)

Fight #4 --- JC vs raiders at the German desert base - This takes place in an underground bunker. This is full of great stunts and JC's classic "fight on the run" style. It's a fun fight with good choreography and the best in the film to me! (Outtake footage shows JC taking a nasty fall from a chain he's climbing. The chain slips down with him and when it goes suddenly taut, he loses his grip and falls, maybe about 10 feet +/- . He hits an outcropping of dirt with his head. This is reminiscent of the fall he took in the 1st AOG film. He needs to give up these 1 point landings.)

Fight #5 --- JC vs 2 raiders in a wind tunnel - This has some good bits in it, especially 1 kick JC pulls off; a jumping roundhouse. Love it! But it gets silly as he and the combatants (one of which is Ken Lo) fly about as the wind sheer is manipulated and reversed. This really could've been better. Not his best end fight imo.

This is a great movie with the exception of some of the comedy bits that just don't come across all that well. There's a few that do though. And there's very small action bits interspersed throughout the film (I just chose the major ones to comment on.) There's still moments of gum-popping, one of which is used as a ruse to kick a bedouin in the face. (I love that bit!) And the movie is full of JC's physicality. He just seems so nonchalant when performing acts of agility. He makes them look so simple. You or I would break our necks.

So, which is better: AOG or AOG2? Well, if you tax me about it.....I don't know. I enjoy the end fights in the 1st more (.....I think). But the 2nd has better stunts especially the chase sequences and is sprinkled with little action bits to keep it moving which the 1st could've used some of.

Regardless, *GET THIS!!!!!!!!!!* This is still Chan in his prime, doing amazing stunt and fight work, and part of the reason we all clamor for more of the same and cry and moan when our expectations aren't met. (by Scott Blasingame)

**Avenging Quartet (Hong Kong, 1994: Stanley Wing) - After "Hsiong" (Waise Lee) – a wanted criminal facing a death**

sentence – saves “Chin” (Cynthia Khan), who is a Mainland police officer, during a bungled drug raid, she travels to HK in passionate search of him. There she runs into “Lui Chai Feng” (Moon Lee) who, unknown to her, is also in love with Hsiong. It turns out that Hsiong also had some criminal involvement with Feng’s recently deceased brother, who is survived by his widow “Seihaji Sen” (Michiko).

All three principal female characters fantasize about Hsiong. After he fakes his own death in HK, both Chin and Feng search for him for romantic reasons, not realizing they are both in love with the same man. Sen, however, has been beaten and mutilated by her husband on account of her prior involvement with Hsiong, and vows revenge. She is depicted undressing, showing her scarred back, while uttering “Hsiong, I must ruin you myself.”

Sen’s opportunity for revenge comes in the form of “Oshima” (Yukari Tsumura), a right-wing Japanese agent sent to retrieve an incriminating document concerning Japanese war crimes against China, concealed under a painting. Hsiong has this in his possession, but initially tries to sell her a fake. After a brief but superb confrontation with Oshima in a private gymnasium, the two Japanese women join forces (Michiko: “I’m Japanese too! We have the same aim”). Sen’s gang then snares Hsiong and Chin at their hideout.

In a remarkably brutal scene Sen exacts her revenge by beating and humiliating Hsiong, forcing him to watch while her men cut and rape Chin. It’s an unusually powerful portrayal of suffering by Cynthia Khan. When Feng and “Paul” – an HK cop assigned to protect Feng and Chin – show up, the stage is set for a violent, climactic confrontation in a burning building.

Michiko, at the top of her form, out-powers Cynthia Khan and Waise Lee – using her sheer muscularity to launch into a kip. She looks fast and dangerous. In the end, after stabbing Chin with a metal rod, Sen is stabbed to death by Feng. Oshima dies in the fire, felled by a collapsing beam, while Hsiong is shot to death by the police as Chin lies dying in his car. Feng is the sole survivor.

Michiko has several intimate scenes in which she teases, then slaps her male partners. In one she is languishing, half undressed, on a sofa. In another she allows one of her men (a gwaito) to kiss and caress her before slapping him and snapping “Get lost.” This sensual contact triggers an apparent flashback to her own physical abuse. In addition to this interesting touch, Michiko expresses considerable venom toward both Hsiong and Feng – the perceived agents of her distress. During her encounters with Feng she’s barely civil, and slaps her face. Michiko’s glittering eyes convey extraordinary menace.

Unfortunately, what starts as a solid drama with an unusual premise and superb cast loses its way meandering through the territory of light comedy and romance. Michiko does not have sufficient screen time to fully develop her part, although the tension between her and just about everyone else (including fellow-Japanese Oshima) is almost palpable. The action climax is certainly well up to the standards of all the principal performers, but the action is sparse before this. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Ballistic Kiss (Hong Kong, 1998: Donnie Yen)** - Donnie is Cat, an assassin with a crush on Carrie, a girl who lives in the apartment building across from his and is also a cop assigned to the task force trying to catch him.

While on a hit mission, Cat runs into a former partner, Wesley, who is working a security detail. They had both once been cops in New York but Wesley double-crossed Cat who wound up doing a 6 yr. stint in prison. Cat kills him or so he thinks. He discovers differently when on another hit mission as he sees Wesley with Carrie as they are apparently old friends. In another botched attempt to kill Wesley, Cat winds up kidnapping Carrie and uses her as bait to lure Wesley out. After a botched exchange that turns into a hit on Cat and Carrie (at a porn theater no less), Cat is wounded. They escape and bond. Another assassin later arrives at Cat's apartment and a ridiculously close range shootout ensues. Finally, Carrie's roommate is kidnapped by Wesley as bait to lure Cat and Carrie to him. Cat goes alone to engage in yet another ludicrously close range shootout that leads to a rather anti-climatic ending.

The movie is rife with shootouts and all contain the thinnest veneer of cover or no cover at all to hide behind. Yen cohort, Michael Woods, makes a brief appearance and has an even briefer fight and it's not even with Yen. There are really only 2 fight scenes: The 1st is at the beginning in which Yen performs a hit on a gang leader at an outdoor club. It's the best but uses a lot of quick cuts, over the top under-cranking, and slo-mo. The 2nd is at the theater and is really interspersed throughout the gun play.

My opinion.....meh. I bought this used and didn't give much for it. I'll keep it but if you're a big Donnie Yen fan you probably won't like this. Unless you're a completionist. (by Scott Blasingame)

**Beauty Investigator (Hong Kong, 1992: Lee Tso-Nam)** - I divide the Girls 'n Genre into three eras: the Golden Age (1985-1990); the Middle Period (1990-1994) and the decline (1995 and onward). This one was made during the middle period (by our favorite independent kung fu director Lee Tso Nam), when the films weren't even the moderate successes that the earlier films had been, but apparently made enough in the Pan-Asian Market to warrant decent budgets before things got \*really\* bad and cheap. Moon Lee is once again a cop who finds herself going undercover at a nightclub, this time as a hostess in order to bring down a sex maniac killer preying on hostesses. That eventually becomes a pointless subplot once Moon Lee and her partner set their sights on the club owner (superkicker Chui Ying Jat), who has hired a Japanese hitwoman (Yukari Oshima) to off the other members (including Chung Fat) of his gun-running gang in order to be the Big Banana.

The movie was more of a comedy than *Killer Angels* was, which is best demonstrated by a chase sequence where Moon Lee and her partner are chasing down a motorcycle-riding Yukari Oshima. Moon Lee is firing her never-needs-to-be-reloaded shotgun at Oshima, only that she misses every shot. However, each blast from the gun is able to make cars explode and other metal objects catch fire! The fighting was choreographed by Jackson Ng (who worked on the One-Armed Swordsman remake *What Price Survival* and did co-choreographing duties on *Magic Crystal*) and it's pretty good. Moon Lee and Yukari Oshima aren't as flashy in their moves as they had been in the 80s, but they're fun to watch. Billy Chow shows up as a Japanese gangster in the end and throws some of his reliable kicks. Chui Ying-Jat really steals the show with his flexible kicking in the fight. Sophia Crawford, stunt double for the Pink Ranger and Buffy, also appears as the villain's wife (in the English dub, she even gets a gratuitous shower scene!). It's a fun movie to be sure, but not quite the classic I was hoping for considering the cast. (By Blake Matthews)

**Best of the Best (Hong Kong, 1996: Andrew Law) - aka Final Option 2** - At this point of writing (in February 2004), Andrew Lau has become one of Hong Kong's cinema's major auteur names. At the same time, rumblings can be heard -- especially from among those who have viewed "The Park", the 2003 attempt at horror for which he has sole directorial credit -- that much of the brilliance in the "Infernal Affairs" trilogy comes from the cinematographer cum director's co-helmer, Alan Mak, as opposed to he who actually has a longer filmography. Although I am not Andrew Lau's biggest fan by a long chalk, I am of the opinion that this insinuation may be on the unfair side. After all, the helmer of such as "The Storm Riders" and the "Young and Dangerous" movies has had other major commercial, if not critically acclaimed, hits to his credit.

Instead, I am more inclined to have the opinion that Mr. Lau is less of a bad director per se and more someone who really does do better when his movies are filled with men and neither fantasy nor supernaturally themed (rather than female characters and special effects promise -- as "The Park" was). And this even more so after my having recently checked out BEST OF THE BEST, a solid enough S.D.U. film that Andrew Lau decided to shoot in 1996, at a time when: "there was a lot of SDU -- the Special Duty Unit -- in the streets of Hong Kong" (See his interview with Miles Wood in "Cine East: Hong Kong Cinema Through the Looking Glass", 1998:67); and he (already) was a hot directorial commodity due to the success of the Y&D efforts (many of whose stars and supporting actors -- among them Blacky Ko, Ng Chi Hung, Jerry Lamb and Jason Chu -- also feature in this police movie, incidentally).

To be sure, BEST OF THE BEST is hardly the most original of films. Not only does the action effort's Chinese title -- which apparently literally translates as "Flying Tiger Great Ambition 2: Arrogance Higher than Heaven"! -- promote it as a sequel to Gordon Chan's "The Final Option" (Wood, 1998:66) but it was a case of "deja vu all over again" for this (re)viewer who has seen -- and reviewed some months back for this site -- "Proud and Confident", a 1989 Hong Kong movie which had Andy Lau and co. as young buck-type police officers bidding to become or prove that they were the Best of the Best, first in training, and then for "real". Indeed, if I see another work like this coming complete with a female weapons instructor who "just" happens to also insipidly become the main male character's love interest (Rosamund Kwan in the earlier offering; the even less believable -- in this kind of role -- Karen Mok in this case), I think I shall scream!

Still, some other viewers might feel more aggrieved with one of BEST OF THE BEST's two leading men being: Daniel Chan, a big eyed Cantopop singer-actor who some people think bear a disconcerting resemblance to Gigi Leung (particularly when they appeared together in "First Love Unlimited"; and Julian Cheung, a Hong Kong entertainment personality who may well be best known to (Western) Hong Kong movie fans of a certain vintage as Anita Yuen's real-life boyfriend. In another part of the site, Brian vouchsafed that the latter "simply doesn't have the stuff to be an action star." Although he looks to have been correct, my own sense post viewing this work is that it seems a genuine shame. This is because, in all honesty, I thought that Julian Cheung not only was -- along with Roy Cheung (who plays Cheung Ying, AKA Eagle, the tough course instructor) and, rather unexpectedly, Herman Yau (as this

work's main villain) -- among the rare individuals who looked the part in this cop drama but also was the person who made it have what emotional depth and resonance that it does.

What's particular cool to me is that this didn't seem like it will be so when at the beginning of the Category III rated -- for possessing politically sensitive content? -- film. Rather, like Daniel Chan's Inspector Chan Hin Tung character (whose being called "Tung Tung" was initially taken to indicate that he lacked maturity but, IMHO, came to be shown that he's the kind of person that others feel able to establish familial(-type) bonds with), BEST OF THE BEST can come across at first glance as callow but turns out to unexpected depths of character and the like. Similarly, and this time as with Julian Cheung's Chi Lam, AKA "Coolman", character, this movie is not without feeling and warmth. In particular, I really liked the bond that developed between Tung Tung and Coolman, the friendship that Tung Tung also had with another "Best of the Best" recruit cum trainee in Michael Tse's "Hommie" character, and the relationship between the outwardly macho Hommie and the older as well as professional woman he so very unabashedly loved (Amanda Lee was by far the most impressive of this offering's females -- who also include Annie Wu as Tung Tung's activist love interest)).

Something else apart BEST OF THE BEST that I found impressive was how its three main sub-plots were able to come together fairly seamlessly; and this especially since their subject matter differ as much as they do. Granted that they all involve Tung Tung to some extent. Nevertheless, who would have thought that what could have been a mere S.D.U. training focused movie also would be able to incorporate a look into the Vietnamese "boat people" in Hong Kong issue -- that, while not as intelligent as that found in "To Liv(e)" still is more layered than the one presented in "Roar of the Vietnamese" -- along with the sort of familial melodrama that stems from a father (played by Damian Lau) having loved more than one woman? (by YTSL of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Better Tomorrow, A (Hong Kong, 1986: John Woo)** - Sung Ji Ho (Ti Lung) & Mark Gor (Chow Yun Fat) are close friends and members of a Triad gang. The gang makes a huge profit by making and selling counterfeit money. Whilst Ho's brother Kit(Leslie Cheung) is training to be a cop and plans to fight the crime his brother embraces. When a deal involving the ever-cool Sung Ji Ho goes wrong, everyone's life's are changed forever.

During production of *Two Tigers in Taiwan*, John Woo got to talking with fellow filmmaker Tsui Hark. Woo & Hark both had an interest in doing a re-make of Lung Kong's 1960's black & white production *True Colours Of A Hero*. When Woo returned to Hong Kong in 1984 he pursued the project. With no big box office hits to his name the film studio Cinema City Company turned down Woo. That is until Tsui Hark persuaded them to make the film with him as the executive producer. According to an interview with Woo, Hark's success in Hong Kong give him more clout and the company was more willing to take a chance with the project with him on board. The literal translation of the Chinese title for *A Better Tomorrow* is, "True Colours Of A Hero."

Ti Lung is certainly a popular star on the forums and doesn't really need an introduction. For that reason, I won't go into too much details about his life. He was student of Jiu Wan who taught him Wing Chun before he started his career at Shaw's in 1968. He often played honourable swordsmen or Kung Fu fighters who nearly always had strong loyalties to his friends and relatives. His role in *A Better Tomorrow* is not that much different even if he is on the wrong side of the law. Shaw Brothers studios had already explored many of the themes present in John Woo's bullit riddled triad classics. Woo came along and gave them a fresh new perspective and a 20th century setting. Sung Ji Ho is a criminal but one who clearly has a code of honour and has strong family ties. Ho is a likable character and not vicious or arrogant like some of the characters. He clearly thinks highly of his protege and friend Mark Gor too.

There's some great chemistry between Ti Lung & Chow Yun Fat, who was enjoying some success in Hong Kong T.V dramas at the time. When I first watched this film I thought Chow was really the star of the movie. From re-watching it with this month's theme in mind I've changed my mind. While Chow does have a lot of screen time I think it's Ti Lung and his character that really holds it all together. When I first caught this back in the 90's I hadn't watched much of his Shaw's output and Chow stole most of my attention. Lung might have been approaching forty when he made this movie but only his receding hair gives away his age. The guy looked really well and wasn't overshadowed by his more youthful co-star.

Definitely no shortage of action as you might expect from a movie such as this. That said the violence is not too excessive to the point it numbs you. The blood soaked action is staged by Hong Kong veterans Stephen Tung Wai and Blacky Ko. Just as ex Shaw's stars were adapting to the changing face of HK cinema at the time, so were many action directors too. The highly stylized gun play on display here is superb. Sam Peckinpah's influence on Woo is clear to see in not just the staging but the editing of the action scenes. The violence is just as stylish as some of the

blood-soaked Shaw Brother epics that featured Ti Lung in his youth such as *Vengeance & The New One Armed Swordsmen*.

There's little in the way of Martial Arts action but that's no bad thing in this case. There are some nice moves and short fights on display in parts. The gritty encounter between Kit and a hit man that turns up at his apartment being one highlight. There's a small nod to Lung's early Kung Fu related roles as he and his brother pretend to spar in one scene. You wouldn't have guessed two old school Kung Fu fight choreographers had handled the influential gun play in this movie. In addition there's some nice shots done by cinematographer Horace Wong. He does a great job framing all of the action and drama. I loved one of the angles used when Marks character gets beaten up by arrogant crime boss Shing (Lee Che-Hung). Wong frames one shot looking down on the scene that captures the actors in front of big neon sign with the busy road traffic below.

Chow Yun Fat is great as the iconic laid back tooth pick chewing, gun wielding gangster with a love of cigarettes. While Ti Lung did enjoy a second wind from the success of this film its Chow's character's film persona that went on to become bigger than the film itself almost. Yet in the story he's clearly in awe of Ho and apart from the tooth pick the two characters are visually alike in many ways. John Woo had a lot to do with the image borrowing some of the look from Ken Takakura's Japanese crime film roles. French actor Alain Delon's crime movie characters also had some influence on the clothes too.

Before wrapping this one up there's a few things I'd to mention. Sung Ji Ho's father in the film is played by actor Tien Feng. Feng worked for Shaw's back in the 60's before moving to Golden Harvest. Here he puts on his usual decent performance despite only having a minor role. Emily Chu is a great actress who has a stand out performance playing Kit's girlfriend Jackie. She's can also being seen in the sequel *A Better Tomorrow 2* & Jackie Chan's *Heart Of The Dragon*. Chu is convincing as the pleasant but sometimes clumsy Jacky. In one scene she fails a musical audition that features a cameo by Tsui Hark as one of the examiners.

There's not much new or original I could have said about this 1980's award winning triad classic. The reason for my focus on the film was due to this month's theme regarding the films of ex Shaw Brother stars post 1985. If I'm being honest I also liked the idea of revisiting the film too. The iconic image of Chow Yun Fat lighting the cigarette with the fake money is still a great one. Ti Lung's excellent performance is still great all these years later even if other parts of the film have dated. Lung clearly still had a lot to offer and looked far from ready to retire. Despite the lack of Kung Fu action he still puts on a performance that's full of life. It's a great tale of loyalty and friendship put to the test in extreme situations. If you are fan of Hong Kong movies of any genre then you won't be disappointed with this one. (by DragonClaws of KFF)

**Better Tomorrow 2, A (Hong Kong, 1987: John Woo)** - The three main cast members from *A Better Tomorrow* are back. Kit is now working on a dangerous undercover mission and the authorities feel his currently incarcerated brother may be of use. Ho is offered the chance to get out of jail early if he agrees to help. At first he turns the offer down, but soon he realizes the best way to protect his brother is to take the offer and use his former status to infiltrate the syndicate himself. Meanwhile the twin brother of the now deceased Mark is living in New York running a Chinese restaurant and trying to avoid paying protection money to the local wise guys.

Once inside the gang Kit and Ho both make contact with former mob boss Si Lung who appears to be going straight but is finding it difficult. It's not long before things go bad and the brothers smuggle Si onto a ship to New York, where he conveniently meets Marks long lost twin Ken. After some hi-jinx across the pond including a pretty cool hallway/stairwell shoot out the two return to Hong Kong and reunite with the brothers. From there on in the film drops some of its cheesiness and heads towards one of the best shoot out scenes of all time.

After *A Better Tomorrow* became a massive surprise hit for Director John Woo and Producer Tsui Hark it was inevitable a sequel would follow. How ever for it to work the fans really wanted to see the show stealing Chow Yun-Fat on the screen again. The problem how ever was his character Mark Lee was killed off at the end of the original. To bring him back a very lame twin brother plot was put together. Still lame or not Chow needed to be there, great as Ti Lung and Leslie Chung are, it was Chow's character that really stood out. Joining Ti Lung, Leslie Cheung and Chow Yun-Fat is Dean Shek better known for comedic roles. Woo and Hark argued over the focus of the film, Hark wished to concentrate on Dean Shek's character, while Woo wanted Yun-Fat to be the focus. As a result of this and other issues between the two the film is patchy and does not have one consistent style. Some of the scenes in New York are pretty sub par, while others like the aforementioned shoot out are fun, though not up to the standard of the original.



The scenes shot in Hong Kong are better though the film still feels choppy. However as the film draws towards the end it settles down and has some great moments of both violence and a truly emotional scene. The film's final shoot out takes things to another level, it's an action cinema piece de resistance. In fact, there's a good chance this is one of the top ten shoot outs of all time and makes *A Better Tomorrow 2* absolutely essential viewing. In fact, this single scene is probably one of the most influential ever put on film as the black suits, handguns and swords come together and define what a bloody finale should be. Woo and Hark take the best from the past and combine it with their new heroic bloodshed genre to define brutal cool. Influencing the course of action and crime cinema once again and no doubt inspiring uber fan boy Quentin Tarantino and a legion of other filmmakers once again. The shot of the hero's sat on a couch at the end is cinematic perfection. If only the whole film could have kept up to the standard of the finale this might have been the single greatest action film of all time. Sadly, the whole film didn't and it's not, but it's still essential viewing for genre fans. (by I Spit on Your Movie)

**Better Tomorrow 3, A (Hong Kong, 1989: Tsui Hark)** - The first film in our Chow pow-wow, *A Better Tomorrow 3*, is a prequel to John Woo's two breakthrough crime dramas, *A Better Tomorrow* and *A Better Tomorrow 2*. It tells the story of how Mark Gor gained the Mark Gor look and the Mark Gor attitude. Everybody remembers Mark Gor, right? He was the wise-ass friend of Ti Lung in the original *A Better Tomorrow*, the one who was rendered lame while on a mission of revenge, and then died one of the silliest cinematic deaths we've seen a Hong Kong actor die. Since Bruce Lee in *Marlowe*, anyway.

For *A Better Tomorrow 3*, John Woo is replaced by Tsui Hark, who produced the first two movies. And while Tsui Hark is a fine director of action movie, heroic bloodshed movies (where heroes and villains are almost interchangeable by their moral stances) are just not his thing.

*A Better Tomorrow 3* opens with Mark Gor arriving in Saigon in 1974. He is there to meet his cousin Mun, who is getting out of jail. After Mark reunites with Mun (played by Tony Leung, but not the one who was in *Hard Boiled*), and Mun's father, they decide to get rich by running guns. We think this sounds like an intensely bad idea, but there you have it. To do this, Mark and Mun need to deal with Kit, the head of the local smugglers. She is played by Anita Mui (*Rumble in the Bronx*, *Heroic Trio*) as both sexy and haunted, sorta like Sylvia Plath as played by Sharon Stone.

Basically, both Mark and Mun want to put the moves on her, but she's only really interested in Mark. The three of them become inseparable friends and together manage to survive after being double crossed by the villainous General Bong. (We swear we are not making this up.)

All of our players, including Mun's father, return to Hong Kong. Mun's father starts an auto repair garage, but dog-gone it, he dies after the place is bombed. Why is his shop bombed? Well it seems that Kit had a husband, Ho, who was thought long dead. But he's back, and he wants to teach Mark not move in on his territory.

Ho takes Kit back to Vietnam, and Mark and Mun go after him. Mark and Mun must try to rescue Kit against the opposition of Ho, Bong, and the entire Vietcong army which just happens to moving into Saigon at the time.

Basically, this movie fails because, even for an HK movie, it's pretty unbelievable. Mark starts out in the movie as bit of a goofball. And we are supposed to believe that he got his trademark attitude, trench coat, and penchant for gunplay from Kit. It's not just that the transformation seems so extreme, it's that Anita Mui is not terribly convincing in her role. Mui may be able to play a lot of things well, but a stone-cold gunfighter is not one of them.

Besides that, *ABT3* attempts to set Ho up as the honorable villain archetype that appears in many heroic bloodshed movies, but he doesn't show up till nearly halfway into the film. And then we are supposed to believe that he and Mark respect each other, but it's tough to see how, as that switch happens fifteen minutes later! And this comes after Ho threatens to kill Mun and kills Mun's father! Director Tsui also misses the point of the final gunfight between Mark and Ho. Ho has a pistol, while Mark is two-fisting M-16s. This may be cool, but it gives Mark a distinct advantage in terms of firepower, and undercuts the scene in general. With Mark seeming destined to win, does his victory seem particularly heroic? Sadly, no.

If you are a big fan of *A Better Tomorrow*, or a big fan of Chow Yun Fat, then this film may be worth watching. To all others, we would suggest giving this one a pass and catching *The Killer* or the original *A Better Tomorrow*. (by Scott Hamilton and Chris Holland of Stomp Tokyo)

**Beyond Hypothermia (Hong Kong, 1996: Patrick Leung)** - Bloody, stylish and incredibly violent. This ridiculous action thriller manages to conquer its implausibilities to deliver a satisfying genre experience.

In the strangest career move since Geena Davis and *Cutthroat Island*, Wu Chien-Lien gets tough and plays a cold-blooded (literally) assassin who's tired of the life and longs to be human. Despite being locked into a destructive relationship with her Cambodian foster aunt (Shirley Wong), she finds some small attraction to a simple noodle-maker (Lau Ching Wan) and starts to make a connection.

But evil Koreans are after her. Led by a vicious Han Sang-Woo (who possesses that dangerous prettyboy look), they seek revenge for the murder of their boss. Typically enough, IT ALL GOES TO HELL.

This film treads on territory previously mined by Michelle Reis in *The Other Side of the Sea* and Anita Yuen in *Taste of Killing and Romance*. Needless to say, it's hard to believe any of these women are cold-blooded killers, especially the petite and fragile-looking Wu Chien-Lien. Still, she handles the role with dignity, and Lau Ching-Wan provides the requisite humanity as her noodle-maker suitor.

Director Patrick Leung does some fine work and if it weren't for the sheer ludicrousness of the plot, he'd have made an absolutely killer flick. As it is, it's stylish, blood-soaked, and a worthy watch. Despite an abrupt and rather dark ending, the film delivers with HK panache not seen since the days of John Woo. (by Kozo of LoveHKFilm)

**Big Bullet (Hong Kong, 1996: Benny Chan)** - "Big Bullet" is the story of the intrepid men (and one woman) of Emergency Unit Car 2 against an over the top set of bad guys. Led by outcast Sergeant Bill Chu, a ragtag bunch of stereotypical cops confront a murderous gang with a gruesome plan to steal nine million dollars. This money isn't in a bank vault, though. It is lodged in the Hong Kong headquarters of Interpol which is hosting a convention of police officials from all over the world. Those at the meeting take on the characteristics of most of the Hong Kong cops shown in this movie—they are too incompetent to get out of their own way let alone take cover or effectively fight back when dealing with armed criminals. The body count in "Big Bullet" is very high—most of those slain are police officers, some are innocent bystanders and only a few are criminals.

Sergeant Chu was transferred to the Emergency Unit after one too many instances of assaulting superior officers. His fame has preceded him and his new comrades are in awe both of his criminal catching prowess and willingness to punch a jerk like Inspector Guan. He the type of police officer who is often featured in movies but who never really exists in the day to day work of any police agency. He is loved by his subordinates, hated or feared by his superiors, a deadly shot and metes out punishment to commanding officers and manacled criminals alike. Hong Kong police movies often have confrontations in elevators or lobbies between criminals and the police officers who have locked them up or witnesses who have testified against them. This time the elevator meeting is between the newly demoted Chu and the Professor (Yu Rong-Guang) an arch-criminal who is manacled between two policemen. He taunts Sergeant Chu who hits him in the stomach. The other criminal leader is Bird, played by Anthony Wong with hair looking like he loaned it to John Travolta for "Pulp Fiction". Both Wong and Yu are as maniacal and fearsome as one would expect.

Early in the movie there are two technically excellent sequences, one following the other. The first takes place in a restaurant where Bird sits down at a table with a Hong Kong plainclothesman and his fiancé. Bird is backed by a thug with a cloth wrapped bundle over his shoulder that might as well have had GUN stamped on it. In just a few seconds Benny Chan and his editor (two are credited) do quick cut among the cop, his fiancé, Bird and Francis Ng, playing another cop who happens to be having lunch at a nearby table. Varying the point of view from medium close up to extreme close up, throwing in a shot of the pistol that Bird is holding under the table, Chan creates a striking tableau of determination, fear, concern and decisiveness in as less time than it takes to tell. This is immediately followed by a very long and bloody gun battle that begins in the restaurant, moves to the street, through a bookstore and finally back to the street. Bullets fly, cars explode, bodies litter the scene and a grenade is tossed with casual insouciance but deadly effect. In addition to pistols, the bad guys have machine guns while the cops have with large gauge shotguns.

Then they do it again.

And again.

And once more.

And then they wind up driving into the belly of a taxiing C-130 that is taking off from formerly closed and currently secret airport manned by British military, some of whom have been suborned by the Professor. He and Bird meet exemplary ends—the Professor would have to be reassembled—the good guys prevail and the last shot ends in a freeze frame setting up a sequel that didn't happen.

A viewer will enjoy "Big Bullet" in direct proportion to his liking for cars that blow up when hit with gunfire or fly into the air when a tire blows out; his enjoyment of watching extras dressed as cops run onto the set, almost always in bunches, and get shot down by criminals and his tolerance for inappropriate humor, such as when the heroes of Car 2 try to avoid being seen by Captain Liu, their boss who has ordered them off the chase. Berg Ng Ting-Yip as Inspector Guan, the commander trying to ruin Sergeant Chu's career, does a good job making the audience love to hate him.

No suspense, no character development, no real plot, lots of gunshots—not bad for its type. (by Ewaffle of HKMDB)

**Big Circle Blues (Taiwan, 1993: Chow Cheung)** - This dreary Taiwanese crime drama traces the fate of four bandits fleeing from a crime spree in HK. Somehow the Chuan gang pilots a small outboard-powered boat to Taiwan, then attempts to fence their stolen jewels. After being cheated of a fair price they engage in a gang war, retaliating by killing the mobsters they have been dealing with and stealing their drugs. It is almost impossible to develop any sympathy for these characters. One of them is a rapist who sexually assaults two of their female hostages, while the movie opens with the gang's gratuitous (and unexplained) killing of a child.

Unfortunately, it is almost as difficult to sympathize with the characters of the police either. Michiko's character "Show-Yun" who is a police officer in pursuit from HK and Mark Cheng's Taiwanese cop "Wei" are constantly at loggerheads, with juvenile one-upmanship. Wu Ma attempt to keep the peace as their Chief, as Wei physically barges in front of Show-Yun, or insults her with remarks such as "It won't work getting dressed like a prostitute" – one of two such egregious insults. These and other sexist behaviors are truly unpleasant.

Perhaps the lowest moment occurs after the gang interrupt one of their number during an attempted rape. As the victim sits shocked and weeping on her bed, one of the gang offers comfort to another male gang member who is upset by what has occurred! He observes "She's just a woman. So why serious?" With such attitudes it is impossible to sympathize with the gang members, yet their hopes and efforts comprise the bulk of the film.

After a series of confrontations on Taiwanese soil that fail to yield a big score, the gang is eventually betrayed to the police. Show-Yun and Wei impulsively confront them. Wei is almost bested until he shoots and wounds his rival, while Show-Yun is injured. This paves the way for a hospital bed reconciliation in which Wei brings flowers and proposes a date! The fight scenes are not especially well choreographed. When the gang flees to a rural farmhouse, it is only a matter of time before they are surrounded and killed in a final confrontation that is predictable and lacking dramatic effect.

Michiko performs competently, although she has rather little to do other than bicker with Mark Cheng. This being one of her later appearances she looks a little more lined, a little older, but relaxed and confident. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Big Deal, The (Hong Kong, 1992: Tony Liu)** - A fine cast that includes Yuen Wah, Moon Lee, Sibelle Hu and Sophia Crawford seems wasted on this slapstick comedy. Moon Lee and Yukari play a pair of masked bandits known as Saint Hero who steal several art treasures. Sibelle Hu portrays a parody of a tough cop investigating the thefts. Unfortunately, unlike most action comedies, this movie has no redeeming action scenes. Yukari performs just as unconvincingly as the others, but is additionally subjected to an inflating breasts sight gag. Remarkably, this movie has the same director as "Dreaming The Reality" and "Angel Terminators II." The only trace of his influence is in Yukari and Moon's physical romping and some brief shoe fetishism. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Big Heat, The (Hong Kong, 1988: Andrew Kam, Johnnie To)** - This film was co-directed by Johnny To and written by Gordon Chan. Although both men would later move on to bigger and better things in a few years, this 1988 "Heroic Bloodshed" (with emphasis on "Bloodshed") film displayed the duo's talents effectively. Many people are unaware of this film and the main reason is perhaps there are no major stars in this film (i.e., Chow Yun-fat). What it does have are arguably the best acting performances ever from a couple of career supporting actors (Waise Lee and Chu Kong) and some of the most violent and bloody scenes in a HK film (and that's saying a lot!).

Waise Lee is a Hong Kong cop named Wong who suffers from a nerve illness in his right hand (the pain equivalency is displayed in gruesome fashion with a power drill plowing through a man's hand!). His former partner's charred corpse is found in Malaysia and a shipping schedule is found near the body. Wong decides to take on the case despite his lab examiner-fiancee's wishes. He's accompanied by three people: his current partner (Phillip Kwok), a

Malaysian cop put on the case by his government and a new recruit straight out of the academy (played annoyingly by Matthew Wong).

The shipping schedule leads to the involvement of a shipping magnate (Stuart Ong) and a businessman (Chu Kong) whose goods are being carried on the magnate's freighters. At this point, the film becomes one big cat-and-mouse game between the cops and Chu Kong (it doesn't take long to figure out he's the bad guy) and there's some bloody confrontations along the way with some unexpected deaths and surprises. This leads to a great finale between the cops and Chu.

"The Big Heat" is a must if you like this type of film. The action is inspired and quite original, the characters are well written and show some unique idiosyncrasies which separate them from your typical good guys and villains.

Note to Joey Wong fans: her part is very small (she plays a nurse and eventually becomes a sort of love interest to the rookie cop) and while she looks fabulous, she's nothing more than window dressing. Michael Chow also has a small but effective part as a hired killer. (by Glenn Setele of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Big Score, The (Hong Kong, 1990: Wong Jing)** - Take a bit of gambling movies, some cop drama, and a dollop of James Bond, throw it into Wong Jing's frazzled brain and the results come out as this enjoyable -- if schizophrenic -- film. The plot revolves around Danny Lee who plays his usual hot-headed cop who is on the trail of a drug dealer named Panther (Lung Fong). Things seem to be going well for the case after undercover cop Anthony Wong gets the goods, but Panther bribes his way out of the charges. He then takes his revenge on Anthony in typical Wong Jing fashion by raping his pregnant wife, killing his child, throwing acid down his throat, shooting him in the kneecaps, and then blinding him by punching his eyeballs with spiked brass knuckles. And you thought you had a bad day at work. Anyhow, Danny is understandably pissed, so he goes and beats up his superior. After being thrown off the force, Danny hooks up with Anthony's old partner (Wong Jing). They hatch a scheme for revenge that involves taking Panther's girlfriend (Joey Wong) and then bankrupting him in a gambling match.

Like many Wong Jing films, the results here are uneven in parts, but overall *The Big Score* manages to gel together in a fun romp. It was nice seeing Danny Lee playing off his usual hardass image. Wong also manages to reign in his usual penchant for toilet humor, and the result is some actual "smart" comedy, including dead-on parodies of *The Killer* and *Terminator 2*. Even Wong's performance is reigned in a bit from his other on-screen work. He plays a wolf, but he's not so much of a dirty old man here. Action-wise, *The Big Score* doesn't disappoint. As per Wong Jing's usual operation, the action is well-shot, over-the-top and quite violent. And, as you might expect, the climatic gambling scene is done well. Even though I still don't really know the rules of these games (even though I have watched a good number of gambling-oriented movies) they are still exciting to watch, due to good performances and excellent editing.

If there is fault to be found with *The Big Score*, it goes to the pacing. The movie really grinds down in certain parts as Wong tries a bit too hard to inject "real" dramatics into the film. Thankfully, Wong seems to know his strengths, and drops the more serious aspects, and quickly switches back to the more mindless fun which he is better known for. (by MrBlue of the HKMDB)

**Black Cat, The (Hong Kong, 1991: Stephen Shin)** - The Hong Kong rip-off machine rolls on with this low budget action movie that bears a not so subtle resemblance to *La Femme Nikita*. As *Black Cat* opens, Chinese-American drifter Catherine (former model Jade Leung) is working at a truck stop in New York. When she gets into an altercation with a truck driver (despite speaking his role in English, he has a pronounced European accent), Catherine ends up killing the driver and the owner of the truck stop. And to make things worse, Catherine accidentally shoots the cop who responds to the situation.

After being taken to prison (where one of the cops has a suspiciously British accent) for a few days, Catherine is hurried to court. Strangely, Catherine seems to have been changed back into the clothes she was wearing when apprehended. In the court house she is able to escape, thanks largely to a mysterious gunman who seems to be trying to kill her. (No, that didn't make any sense as written. Just see the movie.) Once outside, Catherine runs into another mysterious gunman, and this one shoots her dead.

Well, not completely dead. She wakes up in a white featureless room with a creepy guy named Brian (a shockingly clean-cut Simon Yam) who tells her that everyone thinks she is dead and that she has a microchip in her head. That chip is called *Black Cat*, and its purpose is to unlock Catherine's physical potential. Apparently the chip also frees Catherine from having to wear a bra, because she never wears one, no matter how much running she has to do.

The next portion of the film follows *La Femme Nikita* quite closely. Brian works for a branch of the CIA that fakes people's deaths and trains them to be super-assassins. Catherine goes through the training, and she makes the requisite little rebellions and escape attempts.

Once it has been decided that Catherine (now dubbed Black Cat) has completed her training, she is given her first field mission. Her orders are to infiltrate a Jewish wedding (!), kill the bride (!!), and make her getaway despite the many armed guests (!!!). As with the original movie, the getaway plan provided for her is a dud, and she must use her natural wiles to survive.

After passing this test, Black Cat, now dubbed Erica, moves to Hong Kong and becomes a photojournalist. This job is a cover for her assassination activities, though we don't see why she couldn't have been a professional tennis player instead. It worked for Jaime Sommers, right?

On one hit, Erica is spotted by conservationist Allen (Thomas Lam, who looks like he could be Chow Yun Fat's love child), but rather than kill this inconvenient witness, Erica shacks up with him. This leads to all sorts of complications (like when she has to duck out of a movie date with Thomas to engineer a complicated hit) and a not-so-happy ending. There's no "Cleaner" in this version, though.

Being so close to *La Femme Nikita* (and by association, *Point of No Return*), there aren't many surprises to be had. What Black Cat does have to offer is Jade Leung, and Hong Kong action scenes. Leung is certainly attractive, and her problems with the English language aside, she seems to be a passable actor. She also displays a confident physical presence in the action scenes, even if she doesn't do any martial arts.

The action scenes, while low-budget, are generally creative. Sometimes a little too creative. For one hit, Erica is supposed to kill a businessman who is visiting a construction site. For some reason, she has been given only a single small explosive charge with which to kill the man, and it must look like an accident. At first she plans to use the charge to cut an elevator cable so the man will fall to his death. But then the businessman gets a call that causes him to get back in his car. So Erica makes her way to a nearby crane, swings its load of girders over the nearby road, shimmy out on to the crane arm (which is many stories above the ground), and all the way down to the girders. She places the charge there, shimmy back, and sets the explosive off, causing the girders to fall on the car. Perhaps Erica should talk to Scott Evil sometime. As assassination methods go, this was way too complicated. It probably would have been easier and safer to just cut the guy's brake line.

Black Cat turned out to have somewhat less than nine lives, as the sequel that was rushed into production the very next year was a bomb. But for some cheap thrills, you could do a lot worse than this film. (by Scott Hamilton and Chris Holland of Stomp Tokyo)

**Black Cat 2: The Assassination of President Yeltsin (Hong Kong, 1992: Stephen Shin)** - While neither *Nikita* nor *The Assassin* ever resulted in a sequel, the success of *Black Cat* lead, immediately to a follow-up. This is both good, in that it forced D&B Films into coming up with some new concepts, and bad, because what they came up with is a barely coherent mess. They take Leung – who had won the 'Best Newcomer' award – and give her a role where she gets to speak twice. The real star is Robin Shou, well before his *Mortal Kombat* days, and with a much better haircut too.

He plays a CIA operative – the laserdisk subs say this stands for Central Intelligent Agency, clearly dating this before 9/11 – who is investigating a group out to assassinate President Yeltsin. Their chosen hitman has been beefed up with some kind of ill-explained technological wizardry, but luckily, one person can detect the radiation he gives off: Black Cat, who now has a chip in her head (to match the one on her shoulder, hohoho). This leads to an amusing sequence where Black Cat heads off on her own, charges into a mall, and shoots an old lady because – wouldn't you know it? – the senior citizen just happens to be giving off the same kind of radiation, courtesy of her medical treatment. Well, I found it amusing, anyway; there's something about a head-shot which spatters the face of a nearby clown with copious amounts of blood. Er, just me, then? :-)

Okay, the movie may never be dull, and is certainly not short on action. Yet it doesn't make any sense. Why would the CIA send operatives into Russia to save their president? And what are they doing operating in America? Isn't that illegal? Oh, I forgot – it's the CIA we're talking about here. Leung's robotic performance – even though entirely appropriate, since she now comes with a remote-control off switch – also feels like a terrible waste of her talents. There's a lot of wire-work in the action sequences, but it's not badly done; the highlight is probably a fight in a steel-works where both Robin and Jade have to take on large numbers of adversaries. The final battle, when Black Cat fights the assassin around the wreckage of a crashed plane, is cool too, with the two antagonists bouncing off the debris.

However, the overall impact is bitty and sporadic. While there are some nice ideas, they are poorly thought-out and developed, and the script doesn't meld them into any kind of satisfactory structure. The action sequences feel equally bolted-on, though I did like the use of a President Yeltsin lookalike (at least, one presumes it was a lookalike, though I recall the real ex-President Gorbachev did appear in a Wim Wenders film). After the critical acclaim that greeted her debut, Jade Leung could have turned her skills in any direction; unfortunately, this disappointing follow-up is largely symptomatic of the poor choices that seem to have dogged her subsequent career. (by Girls With Guns.Org)

**Black City (Taiwan, 1999: Lam Maang-Cheung) - aka *City of Darkness*** - Three youngsters, including Tso Hsiao-Hu (of the *Kung Fu Kids* series) and Chen Chi-Chiang (best known for playing Goku in infamous live-action adaptation of *Dragon Ball: The Magic Begins* from the early 1990s), initially have nothing to do with each other. But they are kidnapped by an evil crime boss (Collin Chou, of *Bodyguard from Beijing* and *Flash Point*) who knows the truth: they're actually siblings and each of them has a jade pendant, which, when placed together, leads the way to a secret treasure. They escape and are soon chased all over the Taiwanese countryside by the boss's minions and the police, headed by a corrupt commandant. They do get some assistance from a good cop, played by Lee Luo (of *Crazy Mission*, the low-budget Taiwanese equivalent to *Gen-X Cops*), and his hot-headed colleague, played by Donnie Yen.

Fight Scene Breakdown:

Fight 1: Chang Yi-Tang vs. flunkies – When Japanese criminal Collin Chou does a hostile takeover on his Taiwanese counterparts, his right-hand-man (Chang Yi-Tang) cuts up a bunch of crime bosses, plus their flunkies, with a pair of curved knives. The scene lasts a few seconds, but is slickly mounted.

Fight 2: Chen Chi-Chiang vs. Triads – While performing a rock song at a club, a bunch of Triads show up to make trouble. Chen fights them off with an electric guitar and some nice kicks. He does a few good acrobatic moves, but it's mainly a Jackie Chan-esque object fight.

Fight 3: Chen Chi-Chiang and Tso Hsiao-Hu vs. Triads – The same triads try to kidnap both men during a bicycle race. Our heroes perform some decent kicks on and around their bikes. Then they get in an argument and get into a good ol' 80s-style one on one, with Chen impressing more with his kicks. At the end, both men are captured.

Fight 4: Donnie Yen vs. robbers – In his first scene, Donnie is doing some grocery shopping when some men invade the store, armed with shotguns. The action is mainly centered around Donnie dodging shotgun blasts, but he does a few kicks and takedowns here.

Fight 5: Chen Chi-Chiang and Tso Hsiao-Hu vs. Triads – Our heroes are taken to a nightclub, where they are questioned about a treasure they haven't heard of. The break free and fight off Collin Chou's men, who are armed with metal bats and choppers. More solid 80s-style choreography, with Chen doing some decent kicks around a stripper pole.

Fight 6: Chen Chi-Chiang and Tso Hsiao-Hu vs. Billy Chow – While running from both the bad guys and the cops inside a forest at night, our heroes stumble upon Billy Chow, still bald and sporting goatee from *The Death Games*. Our heroes double-team him, but he's not budging. He easily fends off their blows and reaches Fist of Legend heights of rock-hardness. His punch-and-block combinations are fast and his kicks are powerful.

Fight 7: Lee Luo vs. Billy Chow – Police officer Lee Luo picks up the slack from the previous fight. His character is a better fighter than the other two good guys, but still no match for Billy Chow. Lots of good one-on-one choreography here.

Fight 8: Chen Chi-Chiang and Tso Hsiao-Hu vs. Billy Chow (Part 2) – This fight starts in a cramped apartment, moves into a stairwell, and finally into a basement full of found objects. The two-on-one choreography just keeps on getting better, and Billy Chow shows the rascallions just how experienced he is. Their fight is mixed up by the arrival of some bat-wielding goons, just to keep things interesting.

Fight 9: Lee Luo vs. Billy Chow (Part 2) – The rematch goes about as you might expect: Billy Chow is more than a match for Lee, but both of them throw some nice kicking combinations. This segues into....

Fight 10: Donnie Yen vs. Billy Chow – This is their rematch following *Iron Monkey 2* (1996), and it's a solid one. Donnie's character is faster and stronger than the other three protagonists, so obviously he's more of a match for Billy. Donnie does his patented jumping back kick and, at the end, launches into a barrage of punches that resemble

a mix between his wing chun machine gun punches and his Legend of the Wolf blur punches. He takes out Billy with a flying drop kick to the face.

Fight 11: Chang Yi-Tang vs. Kim Maree Penn – Following the death of Billy Chow's character, Collin Chou flies in Kim to deal with our heroes. Chang is skeptical about giving the job to a woman, so the two have a brief exchange of punches and kicks. It's a short duel, but well mounted.

Fight 12: Chen Chi-Chiang and Tso Hsiao-Hu vs. Triads – Set at a restaurant, the bad guys dress up as waiters and bus boys to ambush our heroes. The triads are armed with knives and choppers, while the heroes using a mixture of acrobatics, kicking and throwing plates and cups at the bad guys. Tso shows off more of his acrobatic skills in this fight with a series of somersaults, and gets to perform a butterfly spin over a chair, which is immediately followed by a side kick, all in the same movement. Villain Chang Yi-Tang joins the fray with a wire-assisted split kick, but our heroes run away.

Fight 13: Lee Luo vs. Kim Maree Penn – Lee confronts Collin Chou at his mansion, but passes up on trying to arrest him when he finds out that Chou's men are following the heroes out in the wilderness. When he leaves, he's confronted by Kim Maree Penn, and a fight breaks out (natch!). Kim is a superb kicker and gets lots of chances to show off her footwork here.

Fight 14: Chen Chi-Chiang and Tso Hsiao-Hu vs. Chang Yi-Tang – Another fight between the three has some good choreography, but for some reason, the action directors wire up Chang's movements more than any other character. It's not too invasive, but it's noticeable. I assume it's to show us just how much of a martial arts dynamo his character is and how out of their league our heroes are. Tso does some wire-assisted jump kicks, too. It's mainly noticeable because he seems to stay in the air an extra second longer than a normal person might. The fight ends after a child co-star pelts Chang with firecrackers.

Fight 15: Chen Chi-Chiang, Tso Hsiao-Hu, and Lee Luo vs. Kim Maree Penn – This is a great fight, with Kim holding her own against three trained martial artists simultaneously. She really struts her stuff here, and the choreography is impeccable. The fight actually lasts a while, with our heroes unable to get the upper hand until the aforementioned child sidekick hits her with a taser, which allow the good guys to beat her to death.

Fight 16: Chen Chi-Chiang, Tso Hsiao-Hu, and Lee Luo vs. Chang Yi-Tang – This isn't as good as their previous dust ups, as the three mainly try to avoid getting hacked to pieces with Chang's curved blades while using some grappling to try to restrain his hands. Our heroes get bloodied up real good in this fight. It's broken up by fight #17, which I'll discuss below. Donnie Yen shows up briefly and bests Chang with a metal baton (shades of Sha Po Lang), and then Chen and Tso double team Chang yet again. It ends with Chen side kicking Chang, followed by Tso doing a whirlwind kick as Chang is falling backward, and Tso follows up with a butterfly spin that ends in an elbow drop.

Fight 17: Donnie Yen vs. Collin Chou – Sort of a preamble to *Flash Point*, these two men just go buck wild with the kicks. Chou has a blade hidden in his shoe, giving Donnie a run for his money. Donnie responds with some Legend of the Wolf machine gun punches, and then takes a page from *Who Am I?* and gets in some good hits while manipulating Chou's tie. It ends with a nice jumping spin kick from Donnie.

*City of Darkness* is a low-budget Taiwanese fight fest brought to you by Lam Maang-Cheung, who choreographed the *Kung Fu Kids* films and *The Death Games* (1997), and Yam Pak Wang, who had assisted Lam on *The Death Games*. Both films are similar in that they have Billy Chow, Collin Chou and Kim Maree Penn in their casts, with Billy Chow sticking out the most. The film has a distinct *Crystal Hunt* feel to it, with majority of the screen time being about people fighting with gang bosses until the end, when the story becomes a half-assed Indiana Jones film.

Despite frequently being referred to as a Donnie Yen Movie, Yen is mainly relegated to an extended cameo, showing up whenever the script requires him to beat people up. He certainly does a great job of that, but he's obviously done more and better fighting in other films.

Despite being made in 1999, a year before the Taiwanese film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* changed the game and the way international audiences saw Chinese cinema, this film feels like it was made a decade earlier. It has that low budget shot-on-video feel, a disregard for things like maintaining a consistent tone (like how some bad guys are super violent, and others are just goofs), and most importantly, lots of excellent fight choreography. Sure, a few wire-assisted moves show up for reasons I can't quite grasp, but 97% of what's on display is grounded and looks great. To quote Scott, I say GET IT!!!!!! (by Blake Matthews)

**Black Mask (Hong Kong, 1996: Daniel Lee)** - After Jet Li turned out to be the best thing about *Lethal Weapon 4*, it

was inevitable that some Hollywood studio would release a dubbed version of one of his earlier HK efforts for consumption by American audiences. Filling that need is Artisan, a studio which has dubbed a version of Jet Li's 1996 thriller *Black Mask*, a violent superhero story.

Jet plays a librarian named Simon who has a secret. Yes, you guessed it, he's actually a genetically enhanced soldier who was a member of a super secret military unit named 701, all of the members of which were supposed to have been killed by the government they were created to serve. Simon's best friend in his new life is a kick-ass police detective named Rock (Lau Ching Wan), and the two of them play board games and discuss the nature of pacifism in their spare time.

Before long, however, Simon realizes that not all the other members of 701 are dead, as he believed. It seems that an entire battalion of 701 soldiers survived, and, under the leadership of their Commander, they are making a violent play to take over the Hong Kong drug trade. Simon figures that Rock and the rest of the police department don't stand a chance against his former teammates, so he takes the next logical step: He makes himself a mask and goes off into the night to fight evil -- and immediately walks into a light pole, because that darn mask totally cuts off his peripheral vision.

*Black Mask* is not exactly the most interesting or logical superhero story ever created. For one thing, Simon is never given any motivation for wanting to wear his trade-mark mask. Batman dresses like a bat because of childhood trauma, and Superman goes around in his underoos because he wants to be a symbol. Frankly, it would make much more sense for Simon to just wear a ski-mask, because all he wants to do is hide his identity. Also, Simon as Black Mask resembles the Green Hornet's sidekick Kato -- even Simon's co-worker, Tracy, says so. Sure, Kato was played by Bruce Lee on the short-lived Green Hornet TV series, but he was a chauffeur for Pete's sake! Why would anyone who isn't a chauffeur want to dress like one? Chauffeurs don't strike terror into the hearts of evil doers, either.

Like a lot of HK action films, the script to *Black Mask* is kind of weak. The editing job that Artisan inflicted on the film doesn't help. We haven't seen the original HK version of the film, but we can only assume that Artisan has removed large passages of exposition and scenes have been rearranged. Take, for instance, the early scene where, the day after *Black Mask*'s first mission, Simon asks Rock if he can see a prisoner captured by the police the night before. That prisoner is Kae-Lin (the unbelievably hot Francoise Yip), one of the 701ers with whom Simon had a particularly close relationship. The only problem with that is that Kae-Lin clearly escaped from the police the night before. Much later in the film there is a scene where the police do seem to capture her, and she's wearing the same bad wig she wore in the film's earliest scenes. Why this shuffling was deemed necessary is not clear to us, but these scenes and the repeated use of voiced-over exposition point to a hatchet job.

We are also puzzled by one other editing choice made by the U.S. producers. The library where Simon works is found shot up at one point, and the dialogue indicates that none of Simon's co-workers were actually hurt. This seems unlikely to have been true in the original version, judging from the large blood splatters clearly visible all over the room. To make a point of allowing these ancillary characters survive seems arbitrary, seeing as how the movie has so much violence, some of it amazingly graphic. One example that comes to mind is when mobster King Kao (Anthony Wong, who seems to be on a career long mission to play increasingly bizarre and repulsive characters) explains to the cops that 701 sent him his daughter's legs. In a box. And he has that box with him.

Everything we've talked about so far deals with the movie's plot. Pshaw! This is a Jet Li film, we want to see the man kick some booty! A lot of the action scenes are built around automatic weapons, and that's a bit of shame because Jet Li is such a powerful martial artist. Watching Jet Li wield an uzi is akin to watching Chow Yun-Fat perform kung fu -- it's not just his forte.

Thankfully, there are three excellent martial arts scenes. In one, Black Mask and Kae-Lin duel in a maze of pipes that are high on top of a building. And then there's the final confrontation, where Black Mask must first put down a Caucasian 701er, and then he has to take on the Commander in one on one combat. The fight with the Commander is our favorite kind of HK fight, where the combatants use everything not nailed down as a weapon. At various times, the fight here involves a railgun that fires animated bullets, an airtight chamber, a gas mask and scuba tank system, big-ass power cables used like whips, and some razor-edged compact discs.

On another positive note, *Black Mask* also takes a bit of time for some character development, not only on the romantic side (Tracy accidentally stumbles on his secret life and becomes a simultaneous prisoner and sidekick), but between Simon and Rock as well.

Simon: You think violence is the answer to everything!

Rock: So what, I should just let them kick your ass? Come here, I'll do it for them!



Hong Kong movies do this especially well -- they can stop the action without stopping the plot. It's an art that seems lost as of late in Hollywood films, even though the action scenes in those same Hollywood flicks rarely match the intensity of the fights found in their HK counterparts.

*Black Mask* is much more of a kung-fu flick than a superhero movie; its over-the-top spurts of blood and severed limbs aren't likely to score points with parents. But as with *Replacement Killers*, fans of Hong Kong action movies will probably enjoy the ride while sending a message to the movie studios: Asian stars like Jet Li are making great films and deserve to be seen here in the U.S. (by Scott Hamilton and Chris Holland of Stomp Tokyo)

**Black Sheep Affair, The (Hong Kong, 1998: Allan Lam) - aka *Another Meltdown*** - If there's someone I feel sorry for, it's Zhao Wen-Zhuo (Chiu Man-Cheuk in Cantonese). This guy has never fully gotten the break he deserves. For those of you who never heard of him, he's a martial artist from the Beijing Wushu Academy (the same one that gave us Jet Li) who tried to get into Hong Kong films during the 1990s wire-fu craze. Unfortunately, his level of popularity among the mainstream of moviegoers has never matched his physical talents. In addition to that, to this day, he hasn't made "classic" of his career. Now I'm not talking about a critically-acclaimed movie or one that fans of the genre like.

I'm referring to that one special movie that's the ultimate showcase for the main actor, all his co-stars, the choreographer, etc. It's the type of the film that has a lot of great fighting, great choreography, and makes you feel that you just got done watching the best in the business by the end. For example, Jackie Chan has *Drunken Master 2* (among others) that showcases his awesome skills, Ken Lo's great kicking, some great stuntwork, and great choreographer by Lau Kar-Leung and Jackie Chan. Jet Li has *Fist of Legend*, which is a great showcase for Li, kickboxer Billy Chow, Chin Siu-Ho, old school great Yusuaki Kurata, and is one of Yuen Woo-Ping's best films in years. Donnie Yen has a lot of these types of films (in my opinion), with *In the Line of Duty IV* being my favorite (it's a tour-de-force for the Yuen Clan, Donnie Yen, Michael Woods, Cynthia Khan, and a bunch of others). There are many others: most of Sammo Hung's films from the late 70s and 80s fit the bill, *Shaolin Challenges Ninja* does as well. The point is that a lot of the greats have those certain fight-filled 'fests that enter in the "classic" status almost without question. Unfortunately, Zhao Wen-Zhuo has yet to be cast in such a film.

This isn't to say that our man Zhao hasn't been in any good movies. One of his first roles was opposite Jet Li in *Fong Sai Yuk*, where he played the villainous Or Yee-Tor. In spite of Corey Yuen's creative fight direction, the movie wasn't necessarily a tour-de-force for these two wushu stylists (which it should've been, seeing that it was essentially Wong Fei Hung vs. Wong Fei Hung). He then took over Jet Li's role as Wong Fei Hung in the fourth and fifth installments of the *Once Upon a Time in China* series. The fourth one was derivative, but had some nice wire-fu fighting. The fifth one sucked as far as I'm concerned, as it utterly wasted our man Zhao. Zhao then went on to star in the Tsui Hark's bleak masterpiece, *The Blade* which has won a strong following by fans of the genre (I've only the seen the last fight scene but wasn't that impressed).

Zhao went on to work with Corey Yuen again in *Mahjong Dragon* which featured, if nothing else, a nice finale between Zhao and the super-kicking Ken Lo. He also was in *Fist Power*, *Body Weapon*, and *The Sino-Dutch War 1661*. While each of these movies have (or probably have) their own redeeming qualities, Zhao hasn't been cast in that one great martial arts flick yet. Nonetheless, *Blacksheep Affair* is Zhao's best film yet, as far as this website is concerned.

The movie begins with a group of terrorists being led by a renegade military officer (Xiong Xin Xin in a cameo) taking over airliner. The military sends in an anti-terrorist squad who, not showing much tact, decide to storm the plane screaming "Freeze!" to the terrorists. Unfortunately, the terrorists (who, displaying more intelligence than the good guys, are sitting in the seats and blending in like regular passengers) shoot down the good guys. The hijackers demand that the plane be refueled so it can take off and the military sends in Yim Dong (Zhao Wen-Zhuo) and Ho pose as the drivers of the fuel truck in order to get into the plane. Unfortunately, things don't go as planned and Ho is killed and Dong is ordered to abort. Dong disobeys orders and manages to sneak aboard the plane, disable it, and beat the head terrorist to death in the cargo hold. All in the first 10 minutes of the film!

Dong is demoted for his heroism, since he had disobeyed orders to do it. As punishment, he's sent to the Eastern European country of Lavernia to work at the embassy there. Lavernia is a small English-speaking country that used to be part of the U.S.S.R. (presumably on the coast of the Black Sea) but now is suffering from a bunch of problems including terrorist attacks, a corrupt government, angry mobs, and Chinese refugees filling the harbor. Now admittedly, I can't see why the Chinese would flee to such a place, since the route to get to the Black Sea would take them through the Mediterranean Sea and thus past dozens of countries far more appealing than that.

Anyways, soon after arriving in the train station, Dong witnesses the murder of several Interpol agents at the hands of some shady characters. Dong and his friend, Kwok, beat the guys up and Dong chases the ringleader through the

streets into the subway. There they get into a really nice fight and start throwing and kicking each other through walls and benches before Dong finally bests him.

The guy turns out to be Keizo Mishima, the leader of a fanatical Japanese cult called the Red Sun. Unfortunately, the corrupt leaders of Lavernia give the credit to their own policeman, prompting Dong and Kwok to go into a Chinese-owned bar and sing a song of Chinese nationalism (and no, I'm not making this up).

That night, Dong meets up with Chan Pun (Shu Qi), his ex-girlfriend who fled from China after the Tianamen Square incident. It seems that Dong hasn't forgiven for leaving, and feels that she betrayed both him and his country.

We learn from a conversation between Mishima and the Lavernian minister of defense that the latter is "crookeder than a barrel of snakes" (Samuel L. Jackson, my hat goes off to you) and has been doing some no-no's. Mishima threatens to squeal if he himself is brought to trial. The minister tries to remedy the problem by sending some burly (hehehe..."burly") men to [do mean things] to Mishima in the prison shower in order to shut him, but Mishima kills them all. Meanwhile, Mishima's supporters ambush and kill the Japanese officers sent to extradite him.

At Mishima's request, Dong visits him at the prison where Mishima asks him to join his cause. Dong turns it down quite nicely, even thanking him for the offer as if it were a kindly gesture or something. Well, Mishima's supporters afterward starting bombing the city and the Chinese embassy. This causes a lot of rioting, the which Pun gets caught in the middle. At one point she is attacked by a bunch of disgruntled citizens, who think she's Japanese. They say the first victim of war is truth.

Now this actually doesn't surprise as I once lived in a third-world country for two years and the POV of many of the people there was that all Asian people were Japanese. Whenever I used to try to explain that Chinese, Vietnamese, and Japanese were not the same thing, the response generally was that they all looked the same. Figures. Now I was away from the U.S. during the time of the 9/11 strikes, but I'm curious to know as to whether any individual lashed out against any people who looked remotely of Middle Eastern descent.

That night, Dong finds Pun, exhausted and tired because of the events of that day. I guess he finally manages to forgive her in his heart and put the past behind them as it's implied that they bury the hatchet in her room that night.

The next day, Dong, Kwok, and the Chinese ambassador go to see the minister about him taking care of the Chinese refugees in Lavernia's harbor. After making some cruel and racist remarks, the minister makes them a deal to send supplies to the refugees if the Chinese will transport Mishima to the airport. They accept, not realizing that it's a part of a trap set for them. From there on, we get a lot of gunfights, explosions, and car chases, all leading up to Dong's final showdown with Mishima at the Chinese Embassy.

So that's our terrorist movie for the evening. The American release title for this film is *Another Meltdown*. The name implies that this is a sequel in to Jet Li's *High Risk*, which was released by American distributors as *Meltdown*. This is pure and unadulterated idiocy, as the two films are not related in the slightest. Well, actually, they both deal with terrorists and the main actors in the two films both studied at the Beijing Wushu Academy. But the similarities stop there. Heck, the two films don't even have the same action director (Corey Yuen choreographed the martial arts in *High Risk*).

Now a lot of people criticize this film for it's blatant nationalism and Chinese propaganda attitude. My response is that it isn't the first time that a movie has done something like that. Sure there are a lot of comments about how superior Chinese are and even the aforementioned song-and-dance number, but are there not other classic martial arts films that have done the same thing? Did Bruce Lee's *Fist of Fury* not start the "Chinese are good, Japanese are evil" subgenre of film? Were the first two *Shaolin Temple* films, which are considered classics, also propagandistic? Was Zhang Yimou's much-praised *Hero* also of the same nature? Why criticize this gun-fu movie then?

From what I've seen of our man Zhao, this is his best film. Anyone who has seen his movies knows that he plays most of his roles as a stoic. We actually get to see him show a lot of emotion this time around. I thought it was a nice stretch for him, him playing the role of a patriot who has allowed his nationalistic sense to get in the way of his personal life. The rest of the cast does pretty good. Andrew Lin manages to be a cult leader without overacting and looking silly. The rest of cast does pretty good. The English speakers aren't as bad as say, the ones in *The Master*.

Ching Siu-Tung helms the choreography in this one, as frankly, this is one of the (if not THE) best movies he's worked on. It's probably because for the first time, a movie choreographed by him is actually the best showcase for the actor's physical talents. I mean, usually his use of wires and imagination ultimately overshadows the performers' talents. This is all well in good in movies where the actors aren't necessarily martial artists, but sometimes you just want to see what the people are truly capable of doing. In this film, Ching's choreography is reminiscent of his work

in Steven Seagal's *Belly of the Beast* (or at least the fight scenes that I've seen from it). There are some wire stunts and undercranking, but that doesn't get in the way of the wushu on display here.

So as I said, Zhao furnishes his best martial arts work ever in this. In several of the fights, especially in the subway fight and in the finale, Zhao shows us that he can boot with the best of 'em and unleashes some awesome jump kicks on his opponents. The finale, which begins with hand-to-hand fighting and ends with a sword fight, is nothing short of amazing. It's interesting to compare this film's finale with that of *Mahjong Dragon*. While the two movies had different choreographers, they both made good use of environment and kept the fighting on the ground while using wires as occasional enhancement rather than as replacements for true skill. And while the latter's choreography is more crisp and polished, Zhao gets upstaged by Ken Lo's legendary kicking prowess. In this film, however, the fight scenes truly belong to our man Zhao.

I'd like to recommend this movie to anyone who can watch it. However, there is a bit of brutal violence in it so all those who are easily offended should beware and either wait for it to come on television or seek an edited version of it. While other films may have more fighting, better lead villains, or more artistic merit, this movie does contain Zhao Wen-Zhuo's best performance to date. And that is enough for me. (by Blake Matthews)

**Blonde Fury (Hong Kong, 1989: Meng Hoi) – aka Lady Reporter** - Ah yes, the 80's. It's been quite a while...actually, I was too young to fully enjoy the 1980s. All I really remember is the Ninja Turtles movie...well, that may be a bit of an overstatement. Nonetheless, Ninja Turtles aside, there's something special about the 1980s. Unfortunately, I didn't learn about this special aspect of that decade until the late 1990s and to this day, I continue to see the fruits of this great phenomenon from time to time. What is this great thing of which I speak?

It is the Hong Kong action movie.

During the 1970s and the first years of the 1980s, most of the action movies coming out of Hong Kong were period piece kung fu films ("chopsocky flicks" if you will). However, all this changed in 1983 when Jackie Chan revolutionized the action film with his landmark film, *Project A*. The movie is a masterpiece of action filmmaking and with it we see the evolution of fight choreography, as Jackie Chan and Sammo Hung moved up from complicated, over-choreographed, and style-based fighting to something more realistic. In addition to a change in choreography, audiences saw the inclusion (or rise in importance) of back-breaking stunt work. Actors and stunt players were thrown off of balconies and onto chairs and tables with reckless abandon, all for the sake of entertaining the audience.

It worked, and soon the action fan was blessed with the rise of the modern HK action film. These films were characterized by generally unimportant plots, comic filler in between the fight scenes, excellent fight scenes, and stunts that'll make most people cringe. The genre ran strong from 1983 until about 1990. The following year saw the release of *Once Upon a Time in China* and the rise of the "New Wave" kung fu film which dominated until the second half of the 1990s. Nevertheless, the 80s action film genre saw some of the best fights ever choreographed and this is even more impressive when you consider that there were no computers and little (if any) wires used to create the stunts and moves shown in these films.

Unfortunately, the 80s are over now and with the decade went the 80s HK action film (with the exception of Jackie Chan). In the wake of *The Matrix*, most action films today rely on CGI effects and "MTV editing" and other camera tricks to make the actors (a lot of whom aren't real martial artists) look good on film. While there are some occasional great moments in these films, few have come to close to the greatness of years past. The best movie made from the late 1990s onward to catch the flavor of the old HK action flicks is *Drive* with Mark Dacascos.

While the vast majority of the talent that worked in front of and behind the camera were Chinese, there were some Westerners who got their start in these films. While they were often cast as villains, these roles more often than not proved to be the best showcases for their talents. One name, however, stands alone as the *gwailo* actress who rose above villain status to star as the heroine in a number of films. Not only that, but the small handful of movies she made in Hong Kong at the beginning of her career have been the best films of her career, which has indeed been a long one. Who is this special actress? Who is it that has risen above the "Caucasian villain" and "frail woman" stereotypes to make a special name for herself among the greats of action cinema.

It is the the Queen of the American B movie: Cynthia Rothrock.

Our film starts out with some American FBI higher-ups talking about a counterfeit ring working out of Hong Kong. According to the dossiers of the suspects, most of them are accomplished martial artists. It kind of makes you wonder: To work for any organized crime outfit in Hong Kong (or Taiwan), do you have to know martial arts? How

do they choose their henchmen? Do they hold a tournament like Mr. Han from *Enter the Dragon*? Or do they go around to martial arts schools and ask the most advanced students if they want to become criminals?

Well, the Americans decide that even the counterfeit ring is out of their geographical jurisdiction, that it's their prerogative to send in an agent anyways. Why? Because we're Americans and that's our job, to mess in everyone else's affairs. I guess that's the typical foreign perception of us. Oh well, wuddiagonnado? They decide to send their best agent Cindy (Cynthia Rothrock), who's an accomplished martial artist and fluent Chinese speaker (thanks to whoever dubbed her). She's to go undercover as a reporter at a newspaper whose head editor is suspected of being in on the crime.

Arriving in Hong Kong, Cindy decides to stay with an old girlfriend, whose dad just happens to be the prosecuting attorney in the case against the head counterfeiter. The dad is played by Roy Chiao, who in the 1980s held a monopoly for roles as lawyers and judges in these movies.

At the newspaper, she's given some obnoxious reporter partner. On their first assignment, the two go to cover a story about a burning building and before you can say "wushu," Cindy is already running into the burning building to rescue a child, attracting the attention of Hai (Meng Hoi), a reporter from a rival, failing newspaper. Hai decides to follow Cindy around, hoping to find out something interesting about her.

Cindy discovers that the newspaper she's working for is using its grounds to produce the counterfeit bills. But no sooner than she finds out (bear in mind that "finding out" includes a nice stunt-driven fight scene on a bamboo scaffolding), she's arrested by her partner, who's an undercover cop. The cop's superior (Melvin Wong, who also seemed to make a living playing police chiefs in these films) decides to not press charges on Cindy but asks her to leave Hong Kong.

Cindy's about to leave Hong Kong but unfortunately, there are some complications to the storyline. Her friend's father is kidnapped by Huang Te (Ronnie Yu\*), the head counterfeiter. When he refuses to accept any sort of bribe, Huang gives him a drug that induces madness, causing him to be unable to prosecute Huang at the trial.

Cindy decides to stay to find out what happened. While Huang Te starts sending his men to harass Cindy's friend and find her father's file on Huang, Cindy finds help in the form of an insurance agent (Chin Siu-Ho) and Hai, who witnessed the prosecutor's kidnapping and even managed to get some pictures of the incident...

This summary accounts for the first forty-five minutes or so of the movie. The second half kicks into higher gear as Cindy and her comrades begin to put pressure (i.e. get into a lot of fights) on Huang Te and his gang. This culminates in an excellent climax that takes place on a rope net pyramid, in a labyrinth of metal containers, and on a moving truck.

*Blonde Fury* has typical 80s action film written all over it. The plot is fairly routine and un compelling, but the plots in these movies almost always exist to give the characters reasons to get in fights. Most of the time in between action scenes is dedicated to light humor, the kind of which that isn't as amusing as Jackie Chan humor nor as mind-numbingly goofy as Wong Jing humor. It's more unremarkable humor, but the movie is paced well enough that this isn't a problem. That was one of the problems with *Yes Madam*, which took time away from Cynthia Rothrock AND Michelle Yeoh and gave it to the supporting characters (one of whom happened to be Meng Hoi), who weren't all that funny.

In addition to the typical 80s HK action film plot structure, this movie has a typical 80s HK action film cast. I already mentioned Melvin Wong and Roy Chiao, who seem to be reprising the same roles they had in so many other films of the same ilk. Meng Hoi, the film's director and choreographer, takes a prominent supporting role as the reporter Hai. Like I mentioned in my review of *Hell's Wind Staff*, most of Meng Hoi's roles in the 1980s were those of comic supporting characters. This film is no different. Unfortunately, Meng doesn't get to fight in this film (although he does get beat up by Billy Chow). Rounding off the supporting cast is regular character actor Wu Ma as Hai's father, Tai Po (a regular in most Jackie Chan movies of the era) as Hai's partner, perennial movie bad guys Billy Chow and Chung Fat as...bad guys (who would've guessed?).

In spite of a typical plot and supporting cast, what's special about this movie is Cynthia Rothrock. She owns this movie. This is her movie and no one else's. This is impressive considering that she's not Chinese nor really speaks Chinese fluently. If you look at some of her other Chinese films, she had to share screen time with other main performers. In *Righting Wrongs*, it was with Yuen Biao. In *Yes Madam*, it was with Michelle Yeoh. In *Blonde Fury*, it is Cynthia Rothrock all the way: the plot, the fight scenes, a good portion of the humor...it's all hers. I had the opportunity to meet Cynthia Rothrock personally at a martial arts tournament some 6 years ago or so. I was a bit...well...naïve, I guess. The first thing I said to her was, "I just saw you in *Millionaire's Express* and you were really impressive" (really). I then asked her what her favorite movie was and she responded that it was this one. I can

understand why.

Most of these movies depend solely on their action scenes for any degree of success. The set-pieces make or break these sorts of films, especially since most of the time we really don't care about actual plot itself. First of all, let me say that this movie has an excellent cast of martial artists. First and foremost is Cynthia Rothrock, who gets about 90% of the action sequences and looks great. I'm not sure if she fights better here than in *Righting Wrongs* or *Yes Madam*, but she's awfully good in this one.

In addition to Cynthia, we have Chin Siu-Ho, Billy Chow, Vincent Lyn, Jeffrey Falcon, and some really good Thai dude. Chin Siu-Ho, who's best known for starring alongside Jet Li in *Tai Chi Master* and *Fist of Legend*, gets an OK showing. Well, he fights good, but only has one real fight against Billy Chow. Billy Chow...what can I say? The guy is like the Al Leong or Toru Tanaka (that big Japanese guy who's built like a mountain and always plays a villain) of the Jade Screen. Billy Chow, a Canadian-born muay thai fighter, has played the villain in dozens of HK action films, and, much like Hwang Jang Lee, always brings a sense of authority to whatever film he's in. Vincent Lyn, who fights Cynthia in the climax, also looks fantastic. For those of you who don't know him by name, he fought alongside Ken Lo against Jackie Chan in the wind tunnel sequence of *Operation Condor*. Topping it off is Jeffrey Falcon, who also is an extremely talented martial artist. Falcon is best known now in cult circles for his independent movie, *Six-String Samurai*. That movie is a truly weird film, mixing rock n' roll, Japanese samurai films, and a post-apocalyptic wasteland plot all into one strange mixture.

Enough about the actors themselves, what about the action sequences themselves? They're top notch, luckily. Meng Hoi and Corey Yuen handle the choreography and provide with a number of memorable fights. Where this movie shines is in the use of environment and surroundings to make the fights creative. Scaffoldings, nets, walls, metal containers, etc. are all used by the combatants to great effect. This is actually one of the best movies outside of a Jackie Chan film to make such good work of the surrounding environment. All in all, Meng and Corey manage to find a good balance between pure hand-to-hand combat and stunt-driven action, something that Jackie Chan movies sometimes fail to do.

Because of the similarities in cast (Cynthia Rothrock and Roy Chiao) and Corey Yuen's presence behind the camera, this movie is often said to be sequel to *Righting Wrongs*, although it isn't the case. What this movie is, however, is a solid modern-day action film and a tour-de-force for Cynthia Rothrock's talents, the which seem to have been misrepresented in her American films. That's too bad, since watching this film shows all of us that Cynthia is the man...well, sort of. (by Blake Matthews)

**Blood-Stained Tradewind (Hong Kong, 1990: Chor Yuen)** - Starting in the mid-1950's, director Chor Yuen logged an impressive 122 entries in his filmography over the years, including 1973's seminal comedy *The House of 72 Tenants*, which is credited with saving the Cantonese movie industry when it was at one of its' lowest points. By 1990, he was winding down his film career, with the "heroic bloodshed" picture *Blood Stained Tradewinds* being one of his last products produced for the jade screen.

The movie follows the template of many similar genre pictures, with Alex Fong and Waise Lee playing Chen and Xiong, two adopted sons of a powerful crime boss. Chen's methods have earned him the nickname of "Golden Gun", but he is tired of the Triad lifestyle, and so he turns down the dai lo's offer to take over the gang, instead heading to Macau to try and live a normal life. This creates a weakness in the gang, which the Yakuza (led by Lam Wai) look to exploit. All of this, of course, leads to a bloody finale where most of the characters aren't going to walk off happily into the sunset.

From a story-telling standpoint, Chor Yuen was definitely on auto-pilot here. Most of the actors play inside their usual realm of comfort, with Alex Fong playing the tough but naive hero and Waise Lee once again going to the shallow waters of his oft-used weaselly backstabber well. The matters unfold as one might expect for this type of film, with double-crosses being the order of the day, to the point that the changes in allegiance nearly rising to the level of ridiculous near the end of the film.

Action-wise, there are quite a few gunfights on display here, especially during the final act, but there's very little in the way of originality or flair. It's just mostly two sets of people blindly firing at each other, with the occasional person actually getting shot. Like the movie as a whole, everything is constructed well enough to be passable, but it's nothing close to the level of the classics in the genre. In fact, it would be surprising if a viewer could remember anything specific about *Blood Stained Tradewinds* a few days after they watched it, much less years down the road. (by HKFilm.net)

**Bloody Fight, A (Hong Kong, 1988: Wilson Tong)** - A Bloody Fight fits the late 1980's Hong Kong action movie template to a tee, with Norman Chu starring as Keung, a hit man trying to get out of "the life". Of course, Keung's bosses won't let him go that easily, which leads to a claret-soaked path of destruction that's fun for the whole family -- if your last name happens to be Manson.

But wait! There's a big twist here! Gordon Liu plays Fai, a cop who was Keung's childhood chum and is now investigating a series of assassinations. Do you think the two will meet up and become enemies, only to become friends again? Will Keung fall in love with Fai's sister, which leads to a tragic end? Does this movie feature an annoying kid whom you'll be glad gets blown up real good? Dear reader, I'm glad to inform you that the answer to all of these questions is "yes".

Now, if you're worried that A Bloody Fight's been spoiled for you, don't worry -- there wasn't much present here to begin with. Cheung Lai-Ling's script is so flimsy and full of holes, one has to seriously wonder if he was even trying. Case in point: Fai's sister is kidnapped on a deserted street while escorting a blind man. How could a blind man give descriptions of the suspects to the cops? And then, how the hell would Keung know exactly which boat in Hong Kong Harbour the kidnappers were hiding out on?

There's no doubt that A Bloody Fight is unpolished. Take the soundtrack, for example. Producer/director Wilson Tong must have blown the budget on the Cantonese version of Europe's pop-metal classic "The Final Countdown", because it's played three times during the movie, with the rest of the score coming from stock sources, or outright ripped off from US releases like Halloween.

Despite its' many flaws, A Bloody Fight still ends up transcending the realm of the average and becoming a fairly fun movie, mostly on the strength of its' action scenes. There's nothing fancy or inventive about them -- if fact, the action direction is quite sloppy at points -- but if you're a fan of ultra-violent gags like baseball bats to the nads, people getting impaled with the fork they're trying to have dinner with, or just good old-fashioned dual pistol-wielding bullet ballet, A Bloody Fight ultimately brings just enough to the table to satisfy Hong Kong action movie fans. (by HKfilm.net)

**Body Weapon (Hong Kong, 1999: Aman Chang)** - After his friend's death (Stephen Au), Chiu Man Cheuk must help Au's wife (Angie Cheung) revenge him, which means learning how to seduce a man and then beat the hell out of him, basically.

Yea it sounds like a corny plot, and it is really, but it's original in its own way I suppose. I got this and Fist Power together at the same time, expecting the former to be much better. Well, what are the odds of that happening? Fist Power is one of the worst movies I've ever seen. So this had a good chance after that one. In fact, it's far superior, perhaps due to the cast. If you didn't know, Sam Wong is one of HK's best fighters. If you've ever seen him, you'd know a fight between him and Man Cheuk would certainly be interesting. But I'm giving too much away right now.

The first scene of action is a sparring match between Chiu and Stephen Au, whom I had never seen before. It's mostly a boxing thing, but both of their kicks look really good. Au does some good arm moves and his kicks are convincing. Chiu, though, still looks better and outperforms Au easily at the end with an low right airtrack kick after some chained kicks. Lots of the fight is like those in Gorgeous where they just try to nail eachother with punches, but the camera cuts are long enough for you to see transitions between the moves. Good beginning fight.

Sam Wong and Rocky Lai come into Au's house and attack him. Sam Wong's skills are apparent, while Au doesn't seem to be as hot here as he was with Chiu. He's slow with his weird looking spin moves like backhands and such, but Sam has his kicks down and good hand movements. It's a dark scene but still clear, which was appreciated. After that there is a mild rape scene with no nudity, which gave the scene a really dark tone that I didn't really like since I'm not much into that kind of stuff.

Ah, Sam Wong has been waiting for Chiu, and his wait has been worth it. Easily the high point of the movie, their match is 53 seconds long, which is interrupted by Rocky Lai trying to rape Angie Cheung yet again. But when I cut out this stuff, their match was 53 seconds long. It's extremely well filmed, with some style too, but good style, not the kind of style from Fist Power. There's even some Donnie Yenish slomo here when there are interesting moves, much like in Shanghai Affairs, and in fact the choreography, which I really enjoyed, was similar as well. They're both extremely fast too, which makes it a viewing pleasure.

Chiu fights Sam Wong a second time. Though it gets into the Mr. Nice Guy slomo that Sammo likes to use, it's not too bad because it's in slow motion anyways, so you can still see what's happening. Plus, there's some kind of searchlight going on outside and it's coming through the windows, so the lighting really, uh, highlights it. And Chiu

can do one hell of a whirlwind kick. It's so because he keeps his legs TOTALLY straight, while his non kicking leg is straight outward. More of the same but very good choreography. Fast stuff. 48 seconds.

And then Chiu fights his teacher, which is a lame way to end the movie. The guy can't fight, obviously. Chiu, of course, looks great and performs as though it's a serious ordeal, with some airtracks and good looking kicks. The teacher does BS hits with his entire arms by just flailing them all over the place. Then they get into real BS when Chiu gets behind the dead and hanged Sam Wong and uses him as a Shaolin Ooden Man against the teacher. Angie Cheung seduces the teacher after Chiu is sucker punched.

So, not much here, but most of it is good. Chiu's fight with Au was good, Sam Wong was great and brooding as the main villian who said almost nothing, and the battles between Wong and Chiu were both excellent. Too bad there wasn't more than this. I'm glad to see Sam Wong used more, and I'm also glad to see Chiu used properly, if not a briefly. Another thing I liked about this was the murmur they used during the fights, again much like Shanghai Affairs. Very effective. But a different plot, something that wasn't ENTIRELY about sex, could have been used and probably would have led to more fighting.

Now, you might wonder why I gave this 3/5, while Red Wolf got a 5/5. Well, Red Wolf has action throughout, not just fights, but good stunts, shootouts, and tension. This, however, has fights, but that's it, and no action in between, but mainly sex stuff. If you like that, then great, you'll like it, because it's actually got insight as to where the male's G spot is, but otherwise...(by Eric Jacobus of the Stunt People)

**Bodyguard from Beijing (Hong Kong, 1994: Corey Yuen) - aka The Defender** - I'm not sure exactly when, although it was probably during my senior of high school that a friend of mine, Hung "Peanut" Nguyen, once told me that this was his favorite Jet Li movie. That, however, wasn't quite enough to get me excited about this movie. The Reel.com review, which gave the movie a 10/10 in action (and 8 in violence), didn't really grab me either. Neither did the video from the now-defunct Jet Li Picture House (or something like that), which showed some of the three main set pieces, really grab me.

Thus it wasn't until late in my senior year when I already owned most of his other films that I really made the effort to seek this movie out. It first came on TV late one Sunday evening, but unfortunately inclement weather screwed with our cable and I was ultimately unable to tape it. So I turned to my old friend, the mail-order company.

I had acquired a number of the Jet Li movies in my collection at that time through Advantage Video. However, I quickly grew tired of them because they took far too friggin' long to deliver their bootleg videos (compare with Video Daikaiju, who could have the movies at your house in exactly one week from the day you mailed the money order). I ended up looking for another mail-order vendor and ended up at Grandmaster Video. My first order with them was *Bodyguard from Beijing* (the international dub) and *Once Upon a Time in China 5*. Thankfully, they were closer to Video Daikaiju in terms of delivering the goods than Advantage Video, which made up for the lack of clamshell covers in the films they sent.

So I watched it and I thought it was OK. I watched again not too long after with my neighbor Jean and once again, thought it was OK. After that, I would only watch the final fight of that movie, since the rest of it wasn't quite as interesting. When I came to Brazil, I picked it up on DVD on a double-bill with *Drunken Master 2*, which was a must. Last year I got a second copy of this on DVD when my mother sent me a Jet Li 8-pack (the result of my asking for a DVD of *Dr. Wei and the Scripture with No Words*). I put it on my 2012 To-Watch List and finally got around to checking it out. It's more entertaining the third time around, now that I know more or less what to expect.

*Bodyguard from Beijing* is an interesting film in Jet Li's filmography, as it represents the first time he did an action film set in the modern day after he hit it big with the first *Once Upon a Time in China* film in 1991. From 1991 through 1994, Jet Li made 12 movies(!), 11 of which were period pieces. Those films account for most Li's most beloved efforts and biggest box office successes (at least in Hong Kong). This film was an extreme departure from the formula of Jet Li portraying either folk heroes or characters from successful wuxia novels and would set the stage for a good portion of Li's career during the next two decades.

Moreover, it is also one of the most despised movies he has made, especially in Hong Kong. The movie fared OK in the local box office, but a lot of Jet Li fans simply don't like this film. Most of the reasons for this hate are valid: a lack of martial arts action, no romantic chemistry between Jet Li and lead actress Christy Chung, a story that just sort of simmers until the big climax, and several over-the-top moments that strain credibility in the relatively realistic setting. Of course, as hard as it is to dispute those claims, there are some reasons for them and, if you look at the film in the light at the right angle (and maybe squint a little), there's an unambitious action movie waiting to be enjoyed here.

The movie starts out in Beijing (Presumably), with some politician guy hanging in a swimming pool with another VIP. Shots ring out and suddenly a dozen bodyguards jump into the pool and start escorting the politician to safety. While the bodyguards trying to hustle the man out of the building, über-bodyguard-supreme Allan Hui (Jet Li) appears out of nowhere and starts gunning down assassins that the others somehow failed to notice. He then takes his client by the hand and leads him into a public square, where offs more would-be killers before saving the politician from getting into a car that's been rigged to explode.

As it turns out, all of this turns out to have been a training session. Wait a minute...what? Where did all the blood come from? Do Chinese bodyguards (and those playing the villains) do these sorts of games with bulletproofs and those little blood packets that sometimes show up in movies when people fake assassinations? Second, what's with the exploding car? What happened to the poor suckers who got into the car? Did they die? If so, what is this, Shiri?

I've always liked these realistic "training" sessions that show up from time to time in action films despite the fact they rarely make any sense. The one at the beginning of *Never Say Never Again* was pretty cool, but the movie never answers the question of whether or not he was actually stabbed by the brainwashed hostage. There's another at the beginning of *Heart of Dragon* that features Jackie Chan as a terrorist in yellow sweats. That one was decidedly less confusing, if only because nobody bleeds when they get shot (and well, nobody would believe for a moment that Jackie Chan in yellow sweats would ever be a villain).

Of course, the movie simply avoids all of the questions that one might have about the nature of the training session by simply ignoring them. After a brief scene where Jet Li is admonished by his superior for his over-the-top methods (and it's not like he pulled a *Speed* and shot the politician himself at any point), Jet Li is given his first mission: protect the girlfriend of a wealthy Hong Kong businessman, James Shong (Ng Wai-Kwok, *The Scoundrel* and *Sorrow of the Gentry*).

As the story goes, James's woman, Michelle (Christy Chung, *Gen-Y Cops* and *The Medallion*) witnessed the murder of an accountant by a crime boss. The other two witnesses have already been snuffed and Michelle narrowly escaped death-by-electrified-bathtub, so James is anxious to keep her alive. Since James's dealings in Mainland China are rather important, the Communist government is more than willing to send in one of their better cadets. Being the good commie boy he is, Allan accepts the mission and flies to Hong Kong to take over security at Shong's mansion.

Let me take a moment here and state that you should NEVER act as a witness in a Hong Kong movie. I swear, almost every HK film I've seen that deals with someone agreeing to testify against the villains ends with the witnesses being murdered because police protection is either scant or nonexistent. In *Righting Wrongs*, nobody is around to keep the key witness from being shot to death in front of his family (after which his apartment is dynamited). In *Skinny Tiger, Fatty Dragon*, two cops turn out to be less a match for the kung fu Thai transvestite killers hired to silence Carrie Ng. And then there are the drug boss witnesses in *Flash Point*, who have absolutely no police coverage when Xing Yu sets out to off them. I mean, if Hong Kong was a British territory, why couldn't they just fly the witness over to the Falklands or something until the day of the trial?

By this point, Michelle has bit more protection than those in the aforementioned movies. Allan arrives to find the house being guarded Inspector Fat Po (Kent Cheng, *Once Upon a Time in China* and *Crime Story*) and a bunch of hired goons. After a brief misunderstanding leads Allan to beat them all up, Allan dismisses Po's cronies, much to the inspector's chagrin. Within a day, only Fat Po, and Po's partner, Keung (Joey Leung, *The Kung Fu Scholar*), Michelle, and her kid nephew, Billy (William Chu, *The Story of the Gun* and *To Live and Die in Tsimshatsui*), are staying in the house.

From there on out, Allan proceeds to make life a living hell for Michelle, all in the name of security. He installs security cameras all over the house. He requests several days' leave for Michelle from her job as a P.E. teacher without getting her consent. He even visits her room every so often to scan it for bombs and other traps. He basically ends her social life on all counts until the day of the trial. Michelle doesn't take this sitting down, and harasses and argues with Allan at every turn. Nonetheless, he maintains a professional attitude about it until they receive a certain phone call.

The night before the trial, it's discovered that the murder suspect has become ill and the judge allows him two weeks' recovery before allowing the trial to begin. Allan is given a choice by his superiors to stay on the case or go back to China for an important mission that Hui had wanted to participate in. After the expected bickering, Allan tells her to take a hike and apparently decides to head back to China.

Michelle, finally getting the freedom she had wanted for the past couple of days (what a wuss), takes the first opportunity to go to the mall. Po, Keung, and Billy accompany her, although they all end up in different places (which is to be expected, since Po and Keung are police officers and not über-awesome bodyguards like Hui was). Somehow, the assassins show up at the mall. How did they know she was there? Was it Keung who told them, since he *does* spend a lot of time looking a Michelle strangely and he puts his hand in his jacket a lot? Actually, no. The movie makes a big deal out of Keung acting strange and it amounts to absolutely NOTHING.



Anyway, a murder attempt inside a dressing room is foiled by the sudden appearance of Allan, who starts blowing away any and every assassin who crosses his path. He never actually misses and is so wonderfully-awesome in the heat of battle that he can use a pistol clip as a *throwing knife*, if need be. After killing more than a dozen people, including the head assassin, Allan and company flee and head back to the mansion.

Apparently getting your life saved has a drastic effect on one's hormones, as Michelle spends the next 30 minutes doing everything she can to get Allan into her knickers. This being a Jet Li-produced film, that's not actually going to happen. TANGENT ALERT! You see, Jet Li has gone on record to say that he hated having to do a love scene in 1992's *The Swordsman 2*, and thus opened his own production company in order to guarantee that no movie he starred in would require him to get intimate with his female co-stars. What that mean, however, is that Jet Li would spend most of career doing little more than uncomfortably hugging his female co-stars (if that). I'd like to believe, however, that at the end of *High Risk*, when Chingmy Yau tells Jet Li that there's room in her bed for him, that Jet Li sort of wished that said line of dialogue was a reflection of reality.

The second consequence to Allan's heroics is a little less positive. We wouldn't have much of a movie if the film's main villain were offed at the 50-minute mark now, would we? Of course not! So the lead assassin happens to have a brother, Wong (Collin Chou, *Kung Fu Cult Master* and *No Problem 2*), who's none too happy about watching his brother get shot to death by some hot sh\*t Mainland bodyguard. Wong, who was obviously a violent person to begin with, completely blows his wig. First, he breaks into the morgue where his brother's body is being kept and slaughters all of the security guards with a sinister-looking bayonet before making off with the body. He then wires some guy to explode in the forest outside of James's mansion for no discernible reason. Finally, he just storms the house with a couple of dozen men in tow and tries to shoot the living hell out of everyone present.

When you get right down to it, *Bodyguard from Beijing* is a typical Corey Yuen movie which bears all of the hallmarks of a Corey Yuen movie. Let's see: Explosive beginning? Check. Padded middle section? Check. Overwrought death scene of an important supporting character? Check. Well-choreographed action finale? Check. Questionable physics? Check. Yup, looks like a Corey Yuen movie alright.

Of course, since this is supposed to be a remake (of sorts) of *The Bodyguard* with Kevin Costner and the late Whitney Houston, I assume people were expecting more from the relationship between Christy Chung and Jet Li. I think it ends up being kind of the point that there is no real chemistry between them, because they were really supposed to come together in the first place, not even temporarily. It would've been far too out of character for Jet to do something like that. However, never fear! Christy's attempts to seduce Jet at least give us a chance to see her in some white, almost see-through pajamas, so it's not a total loss.

One of the common criticisms directed at the movie is that Jet Li is portrayed in stoic killer mode, much like he was in the same year's *New Legend of Shaolin*. Corey Yuen had worked with Jet on the two *Fong Sai Yuk* movies the year before, which showcased Jet's acting range a lot more, allowing him to be both funny and dramatic. The criticism is valid, although whether or not it clouds your judgment is a question of taste. Jet Li does give a mostly one-note performance, but he's never unlikable. He's just really serious. I can think of stoic, killing machine performances that were a lot harder to get behind than Jet Li here (*Ultraviolet*, I'm looking in your direction).

There's the complaint about the over-the-top, unbelievable moments that cheapen an otherwise realistic film. First, there's the training sequence, which I've already discussed. Unless they're killing real people, then the set piece makes no sense whatsoever. Then there's the end of the climax, which is really silly and goes against most known laws of physics. How many times can a person spin around before getting hit with a bullet that's been fired from ten feet away? Admittedly, it's pretty silly. Eh, that's Hong Kong cinema for you.

As usual, the one thing that keeps this movie watchable is the action. There's not a whole lot in it, but what's in it is pretty solid. There are three major set pieces and a brief skirmish early on. The three main action sequences revolve around gunplay, since Jet Li is playing a bodyguard. By 1994, John Woo was already wasting his talents in Hollywood, so it appeared that Corey Yuen and Yuen Tak were trying to make up for the void Woo left in the wake of his defection to Tinseltown. People will complain about Jet Li using guns and not his fists, and they have every right to. That said, I didn't have much of a problem, since most of the gunplay is well mounted.

The finale is something of a classic. Set in the living room of the mansion, Jet Li gets to use a number of strategies to come out on top against numerous armed foes. The use of flashlights and a television are rather ingenious. I always wince at the scene where Jet sees a foot sticking out from behind a couch, shoots it, and then blows the guy away when he falls forward. I must also note that there is an acrobatic quality to the gunplay at the end that Corey Yuen also used in the 1995 Jet Li film *High Risk*, which gives it a little extra verve. The final gunfight is also notable for the filmmakers' being willing to not only put a young child in danger, but to have him get shot as well.

After killing a most of the bad guys, Jet turns on the gas and everybody forced to fight with fisticuffs. Jet Li has commented in interviews that he always tries to use a different onscreen fighting style for his movies and I believe him. In *Bodyguard from Beijing*, he uses a lot of short open-handed attacks that look a little like *wing chun*, complemented with chin na joint locks. That may disappoint some who were hoping for some more flashy kicks—I

know I was disappointed when I first watched the film. Today I can bask in creativity of Jet Li's duel with Collin Chou, which features cloth-fu, window blinds-fu, sink-fu, deadly slap boxing, and Collin Chou attempting to imitate Ken Low's kicking from that year's *Drunken Master 2*. There's even a wire-assisted no-shadow kick that looks a lot better executed here than it would six years later in *Romeo Must Die*.

I've been gravely disappointed by a lot of Jet Li's recent films, like *War* and *Sorcerer and the White Snake*. Heck, I wasn't even that impressed with *The Expendables*. Why pit Jet Li against American B-movie kings Dolph Lundgren and Gary Daniels, and then film their fights in the dark and ruin them with shaky-cam? And let's not even talk about *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor*. I do realize that after *Fearless*, his heart isn't into onscreen fighting like it used to be. I just wonder why he didn't make a clean break to another genre. That said, I recently read a quotation from Yuen Woo-Ping where he commented on Jet Li's mastery of speed and control in his fight scenes. I became aware that speed and being able to control one's strength is just important in a fight scene as being able to pull off the slow motion-worthy moves. With that in mind, watching him display his physicality in any movie becomes a treat, including this movie, limited as it is. Besides, at least the action in *Bodyguard from Beijing* is visible, too.

The more I think about it, the more it becomes apparent that *Bodyguard from Beijing* is a shoddy action movie with some entertaining set pieces, a theme song by Linda Wong that I personally adore, and a hot female lead. And to be perfectly honest, that's enough for me. When I watched it last, it was late Friday night and I was exhausted, and yet I still made it through the film without ever nodding off. It's really not Jet Li's best, but it hails from a time when Jet was still giving the genre his all. That particular detail means A LOT these days. Even Corey Yuen's flaws as a dramatic director and writer Gordon Chan's apparent uselessness in *anything* film-related didn't stop me from enjoying this. Thus, I'll give this movie a solid three-animal rating, even if it veers closer to two-and-a-half. (by Blake Matthews)

**Book of Heroes, A (Taiwan, 1986: Kevin Chu Yen-Ping)** - Chinese cinema, by which I mean films coming out of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China, has given the world some of my favorite sub-genres of action film. There's the old school kung fu movie, which needs no introduction. There's the wuxia pian, that crazy genre filled with people fighting with swords, esoteric styles, and striving for control of the so-called "Martial World." Love or hate it, the wire-fu film, a close cousin of wuxia pian, gave us some of the most creative fights ever. There's also the bullet ballet, which turned gunplay into a bloody, ultraviolent art form.

Finally, there's the 80s stunt-based action film. You know the movie: the heroes, usually cops, always found themselves in situations where they'd have to beat up scores of villains, usually drug dealers, who for reasons unknown preferred to cavort around without firearms. Said fights included awesomely-choreographed fisticuffs, found objects being used as weapons, and of course, people being thrown through furniture in the most painfully-looking ways possible. It's the sort of film that Hong Kong filmmakers have all but stopped making, leaving countries like Thailand and Indonesia to pick up the slack.

One of the classes of this sub-genre was the Girls n' Guns film. Girls n' Guns movies have their roots in 1970s kung fu movies, which featured no-nonsense women like Angela Mao, Polly Shang Kuan Ling Feng and Judy Lee beating the living snot out of scores of kung fu baddies, often without the help of their male counterparts. Let me state here that few things in this world are as beautiful as Angela Mao kicking someone in the head. The Girls n' Guns film simply took these sorts of women and placed them in a modern setting and gave them firearms, even though they almost always ended up kick-boxing the bad guys, usually triads and drug dealers, into submission. And that's the way things should be.

Interestingly enough, it hasn't been until recently that Hollywood has really picked up on the idea of a\*\*-kicking women. Hollywood has always had a hard time with that aspect of action cinema. There was Pam Grier and Tamara Dobson back in the 1970s, but they could only do so much for the genre. Years later, James Cameron and Sigourney Weaver showed Hollywood how to do it right in *Aliens*. Even so, on the whole, American cinema has been pretty slow in giving us the femme fatale action we all need in our lives. And even when they do, they almost inevitably make the mistake of over-sexualizing the actresses, turning them into beautiful butt-kicking sex objects instead of confident butt-kicking women.

The thing is, for a long time, the women in Chinese action movies were often just as sexy, if not more so, than their Hollywood counterparts and they rarely were decked out in so much tight black leather that they became a kung fu S&M fantasy or had so much cleavage on display that they'd suffer a wardrobe malfunction performing anything more complicated than a front kick (obviously, there are exceptions, like the naked Alice Tseng sword fight from *Ninja: The Final Duel* or the Pink Ranger fighting Billy Chow in the buff in *Escape from the Brothel*). Hong Kong filmmakers seemed to have understood that confident, attractive women beating the stew out of anyone who

opposes them is a sexy feat in itself. Unfortunately, the people in Hollywood missed that particular memo, and so a good portion of the independent women in action movies from this hemisphere come across as more akin to a young adult male fantasy than a real female character.

The Girls n' Guns film took root in 1985 with the release of Yes, Madam! Directed by up-and-coming director (and veteran fight choreographer) Corey Yuen, the film introduced the world to the martial talents of some American actress named Cynthia Rothrock and an ex-ballerina named Michelle Yeoh. The movie was a pretty decent action-comedy until the last 10 minutes, when the two women storm the villain's mansion, leading to one of the greatest fight scenes ever filmed, bar none. It was followed about six sequels, three of which have been reviewed here.

A Book of Heroes was made in 1986, when the genre was still young. That year saw the release of Yes, Madam!'s first sequel, Royal Warriors and a few other loose odds and ends in the female action movie genre, such as the sublimely silly Magic Crystal. The effects of Yes, Madam! can be readily seen here, as both films mix bone-crunching action and goofy comedy, culminating in a climatic fight in the villain's mansion. Despite this film's derivative nature, it's actually better than its inspiration in some ways, as it deposits way more confidence in its female leads than Yes, Madam! did. Corey Yuen seemed a bit afraid to let Michelle and Cynthia really cut loose until the finale, whereas director Kevin Chu Yen-Ping (yes, the Fantasy Mission Force guy), lets all three actresses pile on the hurt in the opening scenes.

The movie opens with a gang of men armed with AK-47s robbing a gold shipment at a pier. A team of cops led by the inept Hu Pai (Hu Gua, The Funny Family) try to stop the crooks, but are repelled by the gang's superior firepower. There's a mildly humorous scene where Hu Pai chases after them on a bicycle, only to turn and run when the bad guys open fire on him. He rides away so fast that he ends up entering a local bike race and taking first prize(!). That sort of goofy humor defines the sort of sight gag we'll be treated to for the rest of the movie.

We switch to a random bar, where a woman named Hsinmei (Pauline Lan, Myth of a City and Funny Family) is involved in some betting game that involves drinking mugs of beer and sticking coins into a glass of wine, all done with the song "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" playing in the background. After collecting her wins, she notices a drug deal going involving one of the robbers from the previous scene. Soon a fight breaks out between her and the crook in which she goes about throwing the poor sucker through anything that breaks. That sets the tones for the rest of the action scenes in the film; if you were to play a drinking game in which you downed a shot every time someone is thrown through a pane of glass, a chair, a window, a shelf, a wall, a door, or something similar, you'd be in alcoholic coma by the end of the first set piece. More people show up to fight Hsinmei, including a mysterious Japanese girl (Yukari Oshima, Once Upon a Time in Manila and Outlaw Brothers). Hsinmei is arrested after it's learned that she's not really a cop, even though she's always impersonating one.

It turns out that Hsinmei is Hu Pai's girlfriend. Between Hsinmei's antics and Hu Pai's failure to catch the gold crooks in the first scene, Hu Pai soon finds himself relegated to traffic duty. Meanwhile, the employer of the gold thieves, a certain Oshima Yamashita (Yasuaki Kurata, A Girl Called Tigress and So Close), is interested in hiring Yukari (I don't think she's ever named in the film). She accepts and he establishes her salary in the following manner: she has to kill the gold thieves and for each member of the gang she kills, her salary will go up. She does with great aplomb in one of the film's best fights.

One of the thieves gets away and is found by Hsinmei and Hu Pai. They find out that he's sent a map to the gold to his sister, a con artist by the name of Yang Shanshan (Elsa Yeung, Challenge of the Lady Ninja and Pink Force Commando). We meet Shanshan at a bachelor's club, which she gets into by bribing the bouncer, a tiny little kid (Siu Ban-Ban, Magic Crystal) with considerable kung fu skills. She ends up trumping a bunch of white guys in poker, one of whom is dubbed to sound like a Mandarin-speaking Barney Rubble. Of course, nobody likes to lose at poker, especially to a woman who's trespassing at a men's club. So Barney Rubble calls for help, which comes in the form of a dozen men armed with knives. I find it hugely amusing that the employees of a men's club just happen to be going about their shifts with machetes on their person. A huge fight breaks out between Shanshan and the knife-wielding assailants, although the little kid (and his stunt double) helps the lady out.

It doesn't take long for both Yamashita and the cops, represented by Hu Pai and (sort of) Hsinmei, to set their sights on Shanshan. As it turns out, she already has the map and soon she and her lover, David (David Tao, Fantasy Mission Force and Crippled Kung Fu Boxer), are on the lam. They stop at a gas station where they meet its loser owner, Ah Fang (Fong Ching, Ghost Bustin' and The Vampire Dominator). Ah Fang quickly falls for Shanshan, much to David's dismay. Yamashita's men show up at the gas station and another fight breaks out that ends with Shanshan bringing the house down before Yamashita's men blow the place up. Shanshan and David (and later Ah Fang) are captured and taken to Yamashita's mansion.

This leads to an amusing comic sequence where Shanshan and David have a heart-to-heart, thinking that they're going to die. After trading touching declarations, Shanshan confesses that she once took more than her share during a certain job. David is okay with it, confessing that he once took more than his fair share during another job. Shanshan tenderly confesses that she was aware of it, which is why she gave him a laxative. David lovingly tells her that he knew she had given him a laxative, which is why he put the blame for the robbery on her and had her arrested. He goes to tell her that he had an affair with the maid while she was in jail. Needless to say, Shanshan isn't going to be very happy about that particular revelation.

Shanshan, David, and Ah Fang are released from the mansion after Hu Pai and Hsinmei show up. It's at that moment that Shanshan figures out the secret of the map and finds the gold. It goes without saying that Yamashita's goons are going to be in hot pursuit, and soon finds herself back at his mansion. But when she goes so far as to offer herself to Yamashita himself, I think we can agree that she's has something a little different in mind than getting shopped by a filthy-rich criminal. Perhaps she's buying herself time until the final fight can break out?

A Book of Heroes is a pretty good example of the sort of action film that Chinese filmmakers excelled at during the 1980s (and early 1990s). The story takes a back seat to violent stunt-based action that'll make most people wince and goofy comedy that makes the action look all the more jarring. Here we have multiple parties trying to get a hold of a cache of gold, which is ultimately unimportant, since everybody who's watching this movie in this day and age is in it for the fights. The gold is essentially a MacGuffin needed to get things moving. But we won't hold it against this film.

The comedy is silly, but rarely offensive. I've mentioned some of the comic set pieces already. Some of the sight gags involve a car being pulled by a pair of water buffalo and Fong Ching defeating Yamashita's flunkies with a well-placed cactus during the final fight. There's some language-based humor, the best one being the dialogue exchanged between Hu Pai and Hsinmei while they're fighting Yamashita's main goon (Eugene Thomas, the infamous Black Monk of Harlem himself). The two set up a strategy, only for Thomas to react before they do. They soon figure out that Thomas speaks Mandarin. So they switch to Taiwanese, which apparently Thomas understands, too. Finally, they start speaking Hakka, which Thomas doesn't know, and are able to beat him.

It's during the same fight that Kevin Chu Yen-Ping decides to include some racist humor, which may turn some off. At one point, Hsinmei curses Eugene Thomas, calling him "Black Bamboo." Hu Pai then corrects her, telling her that the correct expression is "Black Baboon." It wasn't really needed, and it makes me curious to know what Eugene Thomas thought of being subject to that sort of humor. As he kept on making movies in Taiwan after this, I can only imagine that he was just used to it. I also wonder if that was the actual joke in Mandarin, or if the people making the subtitles figured that would be the closest equivalent.

Bad racist jokes and silly, forgettable plots aside, the film's main drawing card is obviously the action. Once again, frequent Chu Yen-Ping collaborator Lam Maang-Cheung is charged with handling the choreography, which he does. Extremely. Well. If you ask me, Mr. Lam is easily the best action director that Taiwan ever saw. Ponto final. He's basically the Taiwanese Sammo Hung in terms of modern action choreography in terms of displaying the players' skills, making non-martial artists look good, and even in overusing post-filming slow motion. Lam Maang-Cheung did the choreography for most of the Kung Fu Kids series, which Chu Yen-Ping produced and/or directed. I've pointed out before that the sixth film in that series has some of the best action of the 1980s. Apparently having the Kung Fu Kids films on his résumé paid off, because Lam was brought in to work on The Three Ninjas Knuckle Up during the 1990s. Lam Maang-Cheung also worked on the superlative The Death Games and Dark City, both of which have some of the best martial arts action to be seen in the second half of the 1990s, after Hong Kong cinema started sucking.

Helping things is the film's cast, four of whom are seasoned screen fighters. The biggest revelation of the cast is Pauline Lan, who comes across as a Taiwanese version of Moon Lee. Her fighting skills are absolutely stunning; her signature move is a jumping roundhouse kick that goes over her opponent's head, after which she performs a jumping front kick or spinning kick with the other leg. She does it at least three times during the movie and it's breathtaking each time she pulls it off. It's really a shame that Lan only made about four movies, two of which appear to not have any martial arts at all.

Joining Pauline Lan is genre veteran Elsa Yeung, who'd been in the business since the 1970s. She has the least flashy moves of the three leads, but gets the most fight action in the film. Her main quirk is to stop in the middle of a fight and check her make-up or brush her hair. She also gets one of the most random moments in the finale, when she ducks behind a couch and suddenly reappears with a golf club, whacking her assailants through doors and tables. However, Elsa Yeung probably is the best actress of the three, as she's required to be flirtatious, melodramatic, conniving, and all-around manipulative and pulls it off fairly solidly. Pauline Lan and Yukari Oshima, on the other hand, play the goofy and straight kung fu bad-asses, respectively.

Finally there's Yukari Oshima in one of her earliest film appearances. Her role amounts to little more of an extended cameo, but she gets no less than four fight scenes, all of which are simply terrific. Apparently, she was trained in acrobatics in addition to goju-ryu karate (the same style I trained in back in the day), because her specialty is to perform a jumping spin kick and then land in some unique position, like the splits or in a push-up position. I don't think any of the movies she worked on after this ever came this close to showcasing her kicking skills as well as this film does, which are on the level of Yuen Biao at his very best. Her character is very one-note—she puts on her usual nearly-androgynous tough girl persona—but she does get to lighten up a bit at the end for the film's warming-down fight...yes, there's a warming-down fight in this. In any case, this movie makes me want to watch more of Yukari's contributions to the genre. Besides this, the only other Yukari films I've seen are *Angel*, *Millionaire's Express*, and *Outlaw Brothers*. If any of you have any Yukari Oshima films to recommend, please let me know.

The only other notable fighters here are Eugene Thomas and the legendary Yasuaki Kurata. I don't think Kurata ever gave a bad performance during his entire career and even in his sixties, the man doesn't seem to know when to quit. Earlier this year (or late last year) I saw the trailer for some Japanese supernatural police thriller and there Kurata was, brandishing a katana like the old days, including this film. I love that man. I'm far less acquainted with Thomas's work, except that he was based out of Taiwan during the 1980s and spent most of his career working alongside Alexander Lo Rei, aka the Taiwanese Michael Dudikoff. That's right, Thomas was something of an expert of dealing with those pesky ninja foolish enough to pull their shenanigans in ol' Formosa. He's a good martial artist and it shows here, although he doesn't get to anything really flashy beyond taking on two combatants simultaneously.

I'd like to think that this is the last movie associated with Kevin Chu Yen-Ping I'll ever review, although I know that something will drag me back into the director's twisted world later on. I mean, he directed the Chinese Nazi trilogy and this, one of the best *Girls n' Guns* films of them all. Isn't that enough? Do I really need to review the *Kung Fu Kids* films or those *Shaolin Popey* films from the 1990s that feature kids running around with elephant masks on their genitals? I suppose I'll have to sit down and write a review of the wonderfully over-the-top *Butterfly and Sword* at some point, although I'll probably pass on its sister film, the softcore porn *Slave of the Sword*. Same goes for *Lady in Heat*...and *Naughty Boys and Soldiers*...and *You and Me* and *a Girl Named Ugly*...not to mention *Kung Fu Dunk*. Just stick with the films of his I've already reviewed and nobody gets hurt. (by Blake Matthews)

**Born to Defence (PRC, 1986: Jet Li)** - By 1986, Jet Li was well on his way to becoming the next great martial arts star, having accumulated quite a bit of good will for himself on account of his superior fighting performances in the *Shaolin Temple* series, which were very successful in Asia. The first entry in the series was so popular that supposedly kids all over Asia wanted to shave their hairs and study kung fu at the Shaolin Temple. The other two, especially the third entry, *Martial Arts of Shaolin*, were equally as popular, despite the fact that the genre had more or less died a year after the first movie came out.

I guess it was inevitable that Jet Li would want to try his hand at directing, as his contemporaries in Hong Kong, like Jackie Chan and Sammo Hung, had proven themselves just as capable in the director's chair as they were throwing punches and kicks in front of the camera. I think the script for this film, which deals heavily with Chinese Nationalism, also perked Jet's interest, considering how much of a patriot he is. Unfortunately, the film's production ended up being some of a disaster that nearly stopped Jet Li dead in its tracks. While he obviously was able to bounce back from it, Jet never again tried to direct a movie.

The movie begins with a prologue set in China during World War II. A platoon of Chinese soldiers are taking on the Japanese, whom are far more well-armed than their Sino counterparts. The Chinese are sustaining heavy casualties. Enter Jet (Jet Li, *The One* and *Unleashed*), a kung fu-trained soldier who starts flipping around the battlefield like this were a Chinese movie and not a sober war film...uhh...yeah. Jet's antics help his men get the upper hand, although only for so long. Before long, the battle is over and we jump to the post-War era.

Jet and his companions are returning home from their service. They enter the city in a procession, thinking that the crowds are gathered in the streets to welcome them. What they don't know is that procession is actually a parade for the American GIs and not the Chinese soldiers (shades of the Transcontinental Railroad can be seen here), and Jet and his pals are kicked off the street by the ignorant police.

After a brief KOMIC run-in with a prostitute at a brothel (providing some film with some brief, though non-sexual nudity), Jet finds an old war buddy, Zhang (Zhao Erkang, *A Confucius Family*) and decides to stay with him. Jet's buddy is a rickshaw puller and Jet decides to help him out. Not much time passes before Jet comes into conflict with the American GIs. The first run-in comes when one of Jet's colleagues looks into the window of a foreign car, and the Navy officer punches the guy in the face. Full of indignation, Jet tries to start a fight with the man, Captain Hans (Kurt Petersson, *Bruce Lee's Dragons Fight Back*), despite his being almost twice Jet's size. The police break up the skirmish, although the officer's interest is peaked.

Some time later, Jet is at a bar that caters to the GIs and soon finds himself in the ring with another one of the Navy officers, a brutal son-of-a-gun named Bailey (Paulo Tocha, *In Hell* and *Fist of the North Star*). The two get into a traditional boxing match, which Jet finds himself having a hard time adapting to...until Bailey breaks the rules and gives Jet a reason to wushu the guy into oblivion. Bailey decides to take his loss as a reason to make Jet's life a living hell.

After Bailey wrecks his friend's rickshaw, Jet finds himself compelled to work at the bar as Bailey's sparring partner, who wants nothing more than a reason to beat Jet down. After a savage beating, Jet is nursed back to health by a prostitute who turns out to be his buddy's disowned daughter. By this time, Jet's skills have interested Hans enough that Hans wants to take him on in the ring, which will no doubt end in Jet Li taking a beating, although he does end up winning the match. Unfortunately, his beating Hans will NOT mean the last of Bailey's harassment.

This post-War drama shows a bit of promise in the story department, as it once again shows us how the Chinese were treated as second-class citizens in their own country. This time, however, the culprits aren't the British or the Japanese, but the American GIs. The theme here is reminiscent of films like *Fist of Fury* and *Once Upon a Time in China*, but unfortunately takes the former as a blueprint more than the latter, in that its portrayal of Americans is almost universally negative. Bailey and his cohorts (one of whom is black), are portrayed as nothing but a bunch of oversexed thugs and would-be rapists. Captain Hans fares a little better; he simply wants to have a good opponent to fight with and even disagrees with the antics of his men, though he doesn't do a whole lot to stop them. Had the film been a bit more balanced, like in *Fist of Legend*, the story would've been a lot more compelling. That said, it wasn't quite as bad as I expected it to be.

Jet Li has written on his website that he made the film to denounce the Chinese government's tendency to treat its foreign visitors far better than it treats its own people (Jet had to deal with this while working with the Lau clan on *Martial Arts of Shaolin*). I guess something was a little lost in translation, because we don't see a whole lot of the Chinese officials encouraging the Americans to drink and sleep with Chinese women. I can understand his desire to denounce China's practice of favoring the *gwailos*, but the idea isn't developed as well as it should on film. The end result is an "foreigners: BAD, Chinese: GOOD" type of a film that we so often saw during the early 1970s.

I mentioned a subplot of the film, regarding Na, Zhang's daughter. Her character is a prostitute who services the American GIs, and has been considered dead by her father. She comes to like Jet, who figures out who she is and goes about trying to reconcile her with her father. Jet included her to show how Chinese girls were more-or-less forced to be prostitutes for the Allied forces, which was essentially condoned by the Nationalist government. Being a Chinese movie, you just know that this subplot won't resolved in a happy manner.

The action in this film is furnished by Tsui Siu-Ming, the "other" Sammo Hung. Tsui Siu-Ming is best known by old school fans for his role in Yuen Woo-Ping's *The Buddhist Fist*, although he's an accomplished choreographer and director too, working on classic films like *Mirage*, *Holy Robe of Shaolin*, and *Bury Me High*.

Some of the fights feature more Western boxing than Chinese kung fu, although Jet gets ample opportunities to show off his wushu skills, especially in the finale. He gets in some really good kicks in this film, kicks of a level that he wouldn't be able to copy later due to back and leg injuries in this film and in others. He applies his weapons skills in the finale when he picks up a chain and starts swinging around like a traditional chain whip.

Jet has two ring matches with Bailey, a long ring match with Captain Hans that ends in a bar brawl (complete with gratuitous scenes of people falling on tables), and the final duel with Hans in a warehouse, complete with hammers, chains, and pickaxes. The two matches with Bailey are reasonably entertaining, although some viewers won't want to see Jet's skills be muted by the fact that he's forced to fight with only his hands in first and can't fight back in the second. The two fights with Hans are quite better, although the first one goes on a bit too long.

As good as the fights are, I do have to comment about Jet's acting. He runs the whole gambit between naïvete, righteous anger, and good-natured friend. He really does a good job here and is far more charismatic than in a lot of his other films. It's quite a shame that so few of Jet's western films allowed him to really capitalize on his acting ability and cast him as a stoic butt-kicker. *Romeo Must Die* showed it to a certain extent, although *Unleashed* is easily the best example of Western filmmakers making a Jet Li movie and letting the man actually act.

As I mentioned earlier, the production was a bit of a nightmare for Jet (probably for going over budget—notably in the opening action sequence), compounded by the fact that he was seriously injured during the film's production. It got to the point that Jet asked his action director to help him finish the film. Tsui Siu-Ming commented that Jet insisted in putting Tsui's name in the directing credits, although Tsui told him that it was his (Jet's) film in the end. That's what I like about Jet, the man is humble and knows where to give credit where credit's due.

This is a fascinating film with some good fights and a noble, but flawed attempt at presenting a good social message. I won't recommend to everybody, and conservative types will be put off by the brutal violence, profanity, and brief nudity that show up. But at least we can see Jet Li trying to do something more than the usual chopsockey

revenge type of plot, even if it isn't altogether successful. That's more than we can say for lots of other films of its ilk. (by Blake Matthews)

**Brave Young Girls (Hong Kong, 1990: Luk Kam Bo)** - This 1990 "Girls with Guns" flick has some great talent onboard, but never utilizes them as well as it should have. From the mid-1980's to the early 90's low budget production companies were spitting out these types of films by the handful but the vast majority of them had extremely generic storylines that were in place simply to support the action set pieces. In truth "Girls with Guns" fans could generally care less about plot and not much more about characterization – and forget about sets or design – just find a warehouse and have a fight. Action is what mattered and this is what these types of films are judged on – how many fights and how good was the action choreography. This one falls into mid-range territory with a number of decent fights but they tend to be shorter than one would like and the camera placement is surprisingly weak often showing the punches and kicks missing their intended targets by a good margin.

Through different paths four women find themselves banding together to take down the bad guys. Hong (Margaret Lee Tin-long) is part of a brother/sister robbery duo who have sneaked in from China and need money to pay for their mother's treatment. In an attempted robbery the brother is killed by the police and Hong goes on the run. Li (Jo Jo Ngan Lai-yue) has just returned from school and dear mom (Pak Yan) and pop (Gam Bui) want her to make some money by becoming a hostess. Due to their gambling problem they are deeply in hock to Cheng Gai (Shing Fui-on). Cheng Gai is a nasty piece of work who runs girls, lends money and deals in drugs. When the girls cross him he doesn't hesitate to punch them in the face or force them to drink urine (which his men happily supply). Li also goes on the run where she crosses paths and helps Hong avoid capture by the cops. She stays with her grandfather (veteran actor Cheung Hei), but her parents track her down and drag her back to work at a club run by Cheng Gai and his girlfriend (Betty Chan Pooi-kei). Hong eventually also begins working for Cheng Gai as a chicken in a one-woman brothel. Another prostitute Jenny (Ha Chi-chun) is a tough cookie who helps Li escape from the clutches of a horny client one night.

Into this social drama comes a Japanese female cop who is working with the HK cops to bring down Cheng Gai and his boss Reng Ga (Leung Kar-yan). This cop of course is played by the great Yukari Oshima. She doesn't show up till the 45-minute mark but does so with an immediate fight with Cheng Gai and his gang and besides the pleasure of watching Yukari and her great kicks, the viewer is given the opportunity to see her fight Shing Fui-on – I don't recall too many films showing his kung fu skills – for good reason! Yukari later enlists the brave young girls to work undercover for her – but they are soon captured and tied up. Yukari shows up to save the day and has a solid though much too quick fight with Dan Mintz and then a better one with Leung Kar-yan.

There are a couple other smaller fights along the way – one that opens the film but has no women involved. In a pointless but much appreciated cameo Kara Hui Ying-hung shows up to kick lots of butt and then walks off never to be seen again! I wanted more Kara! It is a solid fight though. One poorly used action actress is Ha Chi-chun who was a terrific but little known player – one of her best known roles is as a Viet Cong in Eastern Condors – she has great skills but only gets to use them in a small fight near the end. The action choreography is from James Ha who also plays one of the thugs who gets beaten up a few times. It is decent though clearly quickly shot film and Yukari has a few real good moments of acrobatic flips and falls and her trademark kick over her head move. All in all not a bad addition to this genre but it could have been lots better. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Brotherhood (Hong Kong, 1987: Billy Chan)** - aka **Code of Honour; Triad Savages** - Dick Wei, police officer Mak, is hoping to uncover proof that Ho Chun Hung, the leader of the triads, killed his father 20 years ago. Lam Wai plays Han, a Vietnamese refugee, who befriends Ho, becomes involved in the triads, which brings him into more trouble than he had asked for.

This is NOT a Chow Yun Fat movie. Tai Seng, the WORLD LEADERS in false advertising, put his face on the front as though he runs the show. He doesn't; he has maybe 5 minutes of dialogue, albeit good dialogue, but the movie is led by Dick Wei and Lam Wai. Dick Wei's character is a violent cop that will go through any means to bring Ho to justice. Lam Wai is the star, and he puts on the finest performance. Directed by Billy Chan Wui Ngai, Code of Honor has a few action scenes that are brutal to the bone. People fly down staircases, thrown violently onto concrete, cut with glass, and poked through the face with forks (once). They lead the viewer to a heavy feeling in the end, and ultimately to satisfaction.

Before reaching into the action aspect of Code of Honor, I'll point out the format of the Tai Seng DVD. It's Tai Seng. They take any Ocean Shores print and transfer it directly onto DVD or VHS, without any special cleaning or

processing. The Ocean Shores ensigna is there for that annoying minute, TWICE, the picture is cropped, and the image has a terribly low contrast. Any scene filmed in the dark is almost impossible to decipher, as is the case with any Ocean Shores print. Could be the film stock, but my bet goes on OS's print. There's also the addition of an audio commentary track by Ric Meyers, with Robert Samuels and Tai Seng spokesman Frank Jennings (name?), which I found interesting at times, and boring at others. Ric made some odd assumptions that I wouldn't have been so quick on, such as HK filmmakers not having steadicams during the late '80s (over a decade after they were first introduced). Compared to commentaries by Bey Logan, this one pales. Logan doesn't miss a single detail, pointing out every actor that he can name, which basically covers them all, and giving tons of information on each one. Meyers does most of his talking about Chinese and Triad history, which seems to come from a history book. Robert Samuels and the TS spokesman were much more informative, and I would have rather had them do all the talking instead of 15% of it.

Despite my dissatisfaction with Meyers' commentary, it's seemingly a free extra (\$15 for the DVD). The DVD also has an English audio track for those who, uh, enjoy dubbing, whoever you are.

Sing Fui On wreaks havoc on Wei's brother-in-law in a sushi restaurant by shoving a fork through his face (see the movie to witness it yourself), and then is completely destroyed by Dick Wei. Wei kicks him over and over, making me wonder if Sing was coated with padding, and socks him around for eternity at full speed.

Wei fights Shinichi Ihara, whom I SWEAR I've seen before. This is the only real tightly choreographed action scene in Code of Honor and features prime kickboxing. Very brutal, a true, but professional, street fight, and it's great. Wei's able to put out some cool looking kicks without turning the scene into a flashy deal, while Ihara's obviously a Japanese stylist (since he's Japanese!) and can keep up nicely. Very cool fight, short (30 seconds), but it's the high point of the movie.

Lam Wai has a brutal battle against Ihara in a house. Ihara relies on basic kickboxing and grappling and puts Lam through a load of trouble. Lam ('s double) flies down stairs, TWICE, slams through glass, and is planted onto the ground numerous times. Decent handwork is here as well, and Lam Wai holds his own very well.

The finale is a chase scene that wasn't as intense on the first viewing as it was during the second. Dick Wei chases Lam Wai all the way from Tsim Sa Tsui on the Kowloon side across the bay into Aberdeen. Lam makes a getaway, doing a few high falls (doubled again), one very high from maybe 2 stories up, and Wei makes chase. Lam hops on a ferry, Wei practically car-jacks a foreign woman's sportie ride, and makes it under Kowloon bay in about 3 minutes. Impossible, but very fun. Fans of chase scenes will appreciate this scene, and while there's no final personal bout between Lam and Wei, it's an intense ending.

Code of Honor was a pleasant surprise. It's yet another Hong Kong movie that isn't seen often enough to give it the appreciation it deserves. Saying it has extremely violent action scenes would be an overstatement, as they're more brawl-ish in nature than pure savagery. See it for some brutality excitement followed by a chase scene, and enjoy its self-questioning plot (who do you vouch for? Lam Wai or Dick Wei?). The Dick Wei street fight against Ihara made it all worthwhile for me. (by Eric Jacobus of the Stunt People)

**Burning Ambition (Hong Kong, 1989: Frankie Chan)** - I'm pretty sure this is the sort of Hong Kong film that could have only been made in the 1980s. It's the sort of genre-blender film that characterized HK output during the 80s and the first half of the 90s, mixing elements of Triad melodrama, frenetic 80s stunt-driven action, and even traditional kung fu. The disparate elements don't always mesh, and there is a lot of overacting from the film's younger stars, but it's still essential HK viewing in the end, especially for action fans.

Following the death of a Triad boss (Roy Chiao), the "family" splits into two factions vying for power. The first group is led by Hwa (Simon Yam), who's backed by his Uncle Chen (Eddie Ko) and his mother. They actually have a legitimate claim to the throne in that the godfather had made it known that he wanted Hwa to inherit everything. The second group is led by Uncle Hsiong (O Chung-Hung), who's backing Hwa's wastrel older brother, Wai (Michael Miu). Obviously, Hwa and Chen know that Hsiong's more in it for himself, and decide to have him wasted. But when an assassination attempt at a Japanese restaurant fails, Hsiong brings in his estranged son (Frankie Chan) and his gang of Chinese kung fu bikers (including Robin Shou) to help settle the score.

Despite the Triad moving trappings, the film doesn't really let us in on anything regarding what their criminal activities really are, beyond the occasional murder of a rival. We know that the Triad heads double as legitimate businessmen, but beyond that, most of their activities seem to involve 1) family dinners, 2) business meetings, 3) trying not to get killed, and 4) making sure the other side gets killed. But then again, I don't think authenticity was



all that important in these movies back in the 1980s; filmmakers really just needed a vehicle for the action. That said, I do find it weird that we have a movie in which the “heroes” are ultimately working for the main villain. They know it. We know it. But we still root for them because a) the other side is just as ruthless and they’re doing it for love of family and not out of a sheer play for power.

There are three major set-pieces in the movie, although there’s no big action climax (the final showdown is dramatic and overplayed rather than action-packed). Most of the action is hand-to-hand combat/weapons fighting, with some car chases and gunplay thrown in for good measure. The gunplay is more of the point-and-shoot Western variety, rather than the stylized bullet ballet that defined a lot of Triad action films at the time. The truly iconic set piece is the first major action sequence, in which Yukari Oshima and Kara Hui fight off a legion of assassins armed with choppers in the parking garage of a Japanese restaurant. Both women show off some nice acrobatics and bootwork, and Yukari eventually goes buck wild with a baseball bat. Things get particularly sticky when the ground gets covered with broken glass, since the intended victims are all barefoot.

The last set piece is also memorable, because the plot stops completely so the film can become an old school kung fu movie, complete with shapes-driven combat and traditional weapons. Frankie Chan and his gang chase a team of Caucasian killers (including Jeff Falcon) to an amusement park, where they start busting out the 3-section staff, spear, shuangdao (double saber) and more. Jeff Falcon has a staff duel with Robin Shou before switching to the drunken style to counter Frankie Chan’s dragon fist. Yes, it’s wildly out of place, especially considering the dark dramatic territory the film enters almost immediately afterward, but by George, it’s fun. Like his work in *Outlaw Brothers*, Frankie Chan has this odd anachronistic approach to the action that’s simultaneously weird and fulfilling. It’s like the guy made modern action movies because it was the thing to do, but his heart was still in the old school. And bless his heart for that.

Fight fans really owe it to themselves to check this movie out. (By Blake Matthews)

**Bury Me High (Hong Kong, 1990: Tsui Siu-Ming)** - In the small country of Carrinan (an obvious allegory to Vietnam; though filmed in Mainland China), a rich traveler Nguen (Paul Chun: also a bad guy in *All for the Winner*) is looking for a burial spot, according to the rules of *feng shui*’s sepulchral veneration (aka good burial spot of family that will increase fortunes of descendants.) Helped led by Wei Tien-hsien (Corey Yuen, another *All for the Winner* connection) who warms him of the catastrophe of his plans (one might wonder if Nguen knew so much why he would use Wei.) However, its usefulness is only good for 24 years and will expire like the pineapple cans in *Chungking Express* which itself is an allegory to the upcoming handover. Wei creates a map so a future individual may destroy the burial ground (though it seems that it would run out of potency if you just let the time pass). He also ends up burying his friend into a wealth spot and himself into a wisdom spot (though apparently both with timelines as well). Argh my head is hurting from this logic much like the mostly inoperable tumor of *Wisely* which will possibly make him insane one day, most likely caused by the dad or reading the screenplay.

*Wisely\** (Chin Ka-lok: *Operation Scorpio*) is an orphan who was adopted out to the United States. Upon happenstance he meets Anna Wong (Moon Lee: *Mr. Vampire*) the sister of his Dad’s friend who also happens to be in United States. She believes that the change in fortune between her family and him happen to be because of something changed in the burial grounds or the fact that the 24 year period is about up and the graves have to be disinterred. This does seem to be a rather large impediment to the positiveness of burying someone, especially in a hard-to-get to country. It is not just a coincidence that *Wisely* is probably dying, Anna Wong’s fortune and company is dwindling, and a psychopath General Nguen like any good martial art villain is wearing a cape (guess who he is related to; played by Yuen Wah in a role analogous to *Eastern Condors*) is taking over Carrinan all at the same time. But they need help and they find a somewhat rotund but adroit UCLA professor in the director Tsui Siu-ming (*The Buddhist Fist*).

So when they arrive in Carrinan, with mountains that remind me of Monument Valley, they are in the middle of a civil war led by General Nguen, his sister (Sibelle Hu: *The Inspector Wears Skirts*) and militant brother (Cho Wing; also one of the action directors). The plot does get a bit murky, sometimes overly sappy, but I feel that it becomes rather obvious what will happen as the film commences and who live/die. It just does not hold up especially watching it more than once. Some or most viewers I expect are probably just looking forward to the action scenes.

Unfortunately Chin Ka-lok puts in a milquetoast performance and undermines the role by his ineffectual presence and acting. Luckily he can fight though. So can Tsui Siu-ming, even with a few extra pounds. While he does comment on his weight in the film, he is no Sammo Hung in size. Now Yuen Wah may be playing a one-dimensional character as the military leader/dictator, but he acts it with relish.

The hacker scenes were as unrealistic as *Hackers* (1995) or most films involving computers. Though it is cool to see an earlier 8-bit version of Google Street View. The early police scenes were no better. Cops, usually, do not fire upon an unarmed fleeing person especially for a non-violent offense. Also their quick arrival was pretty hilarious, especially for just a hacker. Also why turn in a person if you are just going to rescue him? Most of the gun battles were pretty unrealistic and sometimes hilariously inept with some obvious influence (though without the gravitas) from *Rambo: First Blood Part II* and *Rambo III*. Another item that is either fun or annoying is the amount of product placements you can find in 1990s Hong Kong cinema. Coca-Cola, Pepsi (the drink of rebels) and McDonalds are three of the usual suspects and all present here with a multitude of others.

But there are some good aspects to this film. The cinematography by Peter Pau (*The Bride with White Hair* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*) who was nominated for a Hong Kong Film Award is superb with helicopter shots, crane shots, nice composition and use of color. It is the most consistently superlative aspect of the movie. It is the only consistently superlative aspect of the movie. Luckily, there are also some good fight sequences and stunts in here which is the primary interest of many people reading this. The first major fight in the discotheque is decent with a couple of nice stunts and combination fighting especially with an uncut sequence with Chin Kar-lok doing a breakdance sweep, to a sweep to a jumping spinning kick. He also (I think it is him and not his stunt double) does a nice painful jump to the floor earlier on. Chin also has a nice little fight with Cho Wing which was too short. The last action scenes are good and crosscut between weaponry, some nice stunts, and hand-to-hand fighting. Finally you get to see Yuen Wah in action who is awesome with combinations, especially against Chin Kar-lok and Moon Lee. It is nice to see so many good side-kicks (the move not an actor like Rob Schneider.) Then there is the most unlikely use of brain surgery you will ever see outside of *The Man With Two Brains*.

I really cannot recommend this except for the fighting (especially the last fight sequence) and cinematography. But I do not think you have to stay away from it either. I noticed most reviews I read were pretty much the same on this film. It is nice to see a Hong Kong film to try a big budget type of action adventure. It was not a box office hit though making under 11 Million HK Dollars.

This was watched on the Universe R0/NTSC DVD. It has a trailer for the film and one for *The Miracle Fighters*. It has Cantonese and Mandarin dubs with Traditional, Simplified, English and Bahasa subtitles. I wish some of the written Chinese was translated. I always dislike when English is spoken and yet the subtitles translate it incorrectly. The print is so-so at best with some damage and a washed out look which hurts the fine cinematography. The night scenes sometimes are close to. The DVD is letterboxed and not anamorphic. There is a Legendary Collection R0/NTSC release of this which I would have to believe given their past releases is better looking. However, given their past releases I have the subtitles might even be worse.

\* The Wisely character can be seen in other films like *The Seventh Curse*, *The Legend of Wisely* and *The Cat* all played by different actors. It is based off of a fictional character by prolific author Ngai Hong (Ni Kuang). Most of his books are not translated in English, but I have seen a few like *The Return of the Hermit* that were.

#### Notes/Questions:

Chinese sepulchral geomancy, a subset of *feng shui*, in dealing with burial sites is a pseudoscience, but it is interesting how this films conflicts with what I have read about it. Normally you are not supposed to bury so high and normally you are not supposed to move after buried. Here is an article from [Travel China Guide on this](#). But there are so many variations like martial arts that it does not matter too much. It also might be because the plot is convoluted that one might think too much of logicity of this if one is inclined.

The burn in hand was taken directly from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

Quote: "When modern science can't prove against its existence, you can't negate it." This is a burden of proof logical fallacy. Also known as appeal to ignorance

Any idea where is that staircase in the cliff is (supposed to be in LA)?

Are the white gloves of the two dictators a reference to someone?

Where else has a bad guy in film died from lightning strike? (by Masterofoneinchpunch of KFF)

**Bullet in the Head (Hong Kong, 1990: John Woo)** - When John Woo originally wrote the story for *A Better Tomorrow 3*, it would be a prequel that tells the story of how Mark Gor and Ho made their fortune to start their business. However Woo and producer Tsui Hark went their separate ways and Tsui made his own version of *A Better Tomorrow 3*. Woo's story sequentially had alterations made to it and would become *Bullet in the Head*.

Three friends growing up in the back streets of Hong Kong have aspirations to become successful and make better their lives. On the wedding night of Bun (Tony Leung Chiu Wai) and Jan (Fennie Yuen), they don't have enough money to pay the costs. Fai Jai (Jacky Cheung) obtains the money but is attacked by a local gangster. Fai manages to fend off the attack still clutching the money but not without sustaining a head injury. After the celebrations have ceased Bun interrogates Fai about the injury, and on discovering the cause the pair launch an attack on the

gangsters. However they go too far and end up killing the head of the organisation. Now wanted by the police, gangsters and loan sharks alike, they are left with no alternative but to flee Hong Kong. They decide to take this opportunity to make their fortune by selling pain killing drugs in war torn Vietnam and bring the third member of their trio, Sau Ming (Waise Lee) along to share in their success. Their priorities change however when they recognise Yan Sau Ching (Yolinda Yam), a Hong Kong singer whom is forced to work for the local gang lord Y.S. Leong (Lam Chung). They then team up with Lok (Simon Yam) in an attempt to rescue her, though Ming's priorities remain firm and is unwilling to leave without Leong's gold. After Yan dies of a gun shot wound sustained in the rescue, Bun, Fai and Ming stray into North Vietnamese territory and find themselves in a POW camp. Our protagonists must now battle for survival.

*Bullet in the Head* was a very expensive and ambitious project for the Hong Kong film industry at the time. Sadly it failed to make an impact at the box office as the public rejected a film with such a downbeat sensibility, especially in the wake of the Tiananmen Square Crackdown, an event which would influence Woo in his execution of the film. A great shame as this very personal project is one of Woo's finest moments.

One could speculate if Chow Yun Fat had been in the cast (as was intended when it was originally written), as to whether his presence would have coaxed enough punters to see the film in order to re-coup the money spent. However, Tony Leung Chiu Wai and Jacky Cheung were hired and at the time neither were known for dramatic roles, as Tony had done mainly comedies and Jacky was known primarily for his singing career. *Bullet in the Head* would prove to be the film to make them both bankable dramatic actors as both take the bull by the horns and produce some astounding results. Jacky Cheung received a well deserved nomination for best actor at the Hong Kong film awards for his efforts. Tony would of course go on to be one of the most respected actors of the last 15 years. Simon Yam was also just beginning to come into his own as he delivers a delightfully measured, mature and, above all, cool performance.

Taking our protagonists from small time street punk antics to street riots, taking on an organised crime syndicate and inadvertently playing their own little part in a brutal war as they find themselves in a POW camp, 'Bullet in the Head' certainly takes it's audience on a journey. As the film nears it's end you are likely to feel emotionally drained as you will feel as if you have experienced the ordeal along with our protagonists. Woo gives us a tale of brotherhood, loyalty, tragedy, redemption, greed, corruption and betrayal. At times harrowing, *Bullet in the Head* is equally compelling. No John Woo picture of the period would be complete without lavish gun battles, and *Bullet in the Head* is no exception. Although we are not subjected to anything as outlandish as was displayed in *The Killer* one year earlier. This would have much to do with the poignant and almost depressing subject matter. Though what we are left with still leave most standing idle. Throw in a superb soundtrack and you have an all time classic in the making.

I have one major criticism however. The original boardroom ending was replaced after being deemed too bleak. This was then replaced with an all action car chase ending. While there is nothing inherently wrong with the sequence itself, it is unsuited to finish this particular film. This film was meant to have a sudden, hard hitting ending. One that would resonate in the minds of the audience long after they had left the theatre. What we are left with is a drawn out action sequence that allows the emotion that has built up during the course of the film to dissipate before the end credits roll. The original negatives for the boardroom ending unfortunately seem to be lost and the only known version with this ending is the now deleted Mei Ah VCD. Therefore the chances of it being re-instated seem highly improbable.

Despite my criticism about the final sequence, *Bullet in the Head* still packs an enormous emotional punch and is very much one of the all time classics of Hong Kong cinema. A must have for any serious collector. (by Pat King of Far East Films)

**Carry On, Pickpocket (Hong Kong, 1982: Sammo Hung)** - SH is Rice Pot and FC is Chimney, a pair of pickpockets who work in a quartet of thieves with Kim (LHS) and his daughter, Anne (DP). They are coerced at one point to begin stealing ID cards in addition to the cash they take during their thieving. Ling (DY), a female police officer Rice Pot falls for, includes him in a sting operation against a mob boss. But Kim manages to get his hands on some of the mob's diamonds and brings the wrath of the crime boss on the 4 thieves.

#### Opening Credits

This shows the pickpocket gang plying their trade. It's fun and interesting to watch as they use various ruses of distraction to casually bump into their victims and rob them of their wallets.

Dance Scene/Fight #1 - Takes place at a nightclub. To impress a girl, Ling (DY), Rice Pot (Sammo wearing a Mickey Mouse sweatshirt) sticks 2 forks into a couple of dinner rolls to create a pair of feet which he makes dance pre-Johnny Depp in *Benny & Joon*. (This was actually a schtick first performed by Charlie Chaplin in the 1925 film *The Gold Rush*.) She asks him to dance. It's a slow dance that changes into a fun dance when the disco music kicks in. This isn't as comical as some of Sammo's other dance scenes in film but you just can't deny "the Fat Dragon" has got some rhythm.

But some jerks decide to ruin it for everybody by picking a fight with Chimney (FC), so....Rice Pot cuts in. The fight starts with a jumping double kick and ends with a well-timed belly bump. It's a short fight but SH deftly puts these jerks in their place. It's classic Sammo choreography with fast back-fists and powerful kicks.

Fight #2 --- Rice Pot & Chimney vs gang members - Takes place in a junkyard. It's short but good! Sammo executes a powerful side kick and sends a guy flying through a stack of 5 gallon metal cans.

Fight #3 --- Rice Pot & Chimney vs mobsters - The mobsters (one of which is Dick Wei) catch the pickpockets at their apartment. This is a very brief skirmish but Dick Wei unloads a cool beatdown on Sammo. Later as they're chased through a park which is a popular make-out spot, SH unleashes another jumping double kick on 2 goons.

Fight #4 --- End Fight - Takes place on a docked freight ship. Once the fighting sets off, I cannot even begin to describe just how bodaciously brutal some of the exchanges are. This is some of Sammo's bloodiest fights I've ever seen. The icing on the cake is the final throwdown between he and Dick Wei. And I'll leave it at that. (Though it didn't exactly end like I'd have liked for it to. Still.....)

This is an early modern actioner. It's one of my favorites from Sammo. While the film drags on plot-wise what with the funny bits and romance, the fight choreography more than makes up for it. FC performs his fights quite well. (I'm unaware if he has any formal MA training or not.) Just as amazing to me sometimes is the dexterity shown in how they pick people's pockets. Granted, I'm sure they weren't really doing it in every instance but the techniques are real. It's all about misdirection. It's a form of legerdemain (sleight of hand). It fascinates me.

But the end fight choreography.....Man! This is one of the best "end fight" sequences in all of Sammo's films as far as I'm concerned. The first time I watched this years ago, I was physically cringing at some of the hits. I mean, it's full of "rewind" moments. If you're a Sammo fan and you've never bothered to track this down, get on it and GET THIS!!!!!!! (by Scott Blasingame)

**Casino (Hong Kong, 1998: Billy Tang)** - Like Danny Lee for cop movies, Simon Yam is perhaps the ultimate Hong Kong crime movie star. He looks the part -- suave but tough -- and his acting skills make even the sleaziest dai lo seem sympathetic, and he's certainly been in some of the classics of the genre. Unfortunately, *Casino* isn't one of them. It's a good Triad movie, but it's nothing you haven't seen many times over, both from the US and HK.

The plot (which is based on real events and was funded by gangsters, even though there's a big disclaimer at the end of the film) has Simon and his friend Alex Fong as two upstarts in the Macau gambling scene. They're tired of being small potatoes, and after enlisting the help of a dirty cop (Kent Cheng), they manage to topple their boss and seem poised to take over all of Macau until a new rival (Ben Ng) rears his head. As his power grows, Simon must also deal with his estranged wife and a deadly illness that threatens to take his friend's life.

Most of the story is told in flashback as Simon and his associates are being interviewed by a reporter played by Kenix Kwok. This results in overuse of the tired "talking into the camera" device, which really started to annoy me after a while. Besides that, the story is just old hat. Director "Bloody" Billy Tang (the guy behind such sleaze classics such as *Red to Kill*) tries to liven things up with lots of Triad battles, but there's nothing behind them. It's just violence for the sake of violence, and that's boring. Besides, it's not even that bloody -- I suspect the Category III rating came more for Triad references (it's a big no-no in HK movies to refer to specific gangsters or gangs) rather than brawls.

It's kind of a shame that *Casino* didn't turn out better than it did. The movie has a solid cast, a talented director, and a fairly large budget (especially in this day and age of straight-to-video quickies). But the script is totally by-the-numbers, and hold little interest for the viewer. This isn't a bad film by any means, but Hong Kong has certainly turned out many other crime movies which are more deserving of your time than this one. (by MrBlue of HKMDB)

**Casino Raiders (Hong Kong, 1989: Wong Jing)** - This gambling movie was actually released before the seminal *God*

of Gamblers, and in many ways it takes a quite different approach to the genre. It's closer in spirit to the gritty, violent gangster movies that were so popular in the late Eighties, and while we do have a big showdown at the gambling table (complete with a bit twist revealed in the final hand) finishing the movie, there's little gambling going on in the preceding 2 hrs.

The story is about 2 friends called Sam (Alan Tam) and Crab Chan (Andy Lau), who make their living with professional gambling. At the request of a friend, they travel to a US casino in Lake Tahoe to help put an end to a gambling scheme that is costing the casino loads of money. The trip proves fateful in many ways: By helping the casino, they make mortal enemies of some Japanese Yakuza gamblers. At the same time, Sam falls for rich HK socialite Idy Chan, and decides to become an honest citizen. Idy's father offers him a career in his company, and soon Sam is climbing the corporate ladder and enjoying marital bliss with rich girl Idy, while the somewhat more bluecollar Crab is stuck with big-eyed floozy Rosamund Kwan and with a failed gambling career after his hand is injured during an assassination attempt.

Of course the Yakuza guys won't stop until Sam and Crab are dead, and it's here that the film takes a turn towards heavy melodrama coupled with lots of gunplay. Several central characters meet an untimely, bloody end and Sam has no choice but to take on the Japanese in a final, decisive high-stakes gambling duel. He does so in classic fashion, with everything on the line, and the final match is indeed quite gripping with a surprising end.

The film suffers from the fact that Alan Tam is not a very charismatic actor, and one would have wished that Andy Lau had been given more screentime and Alan less. All in all, it's a rather average movie with some pretty dull stretches that is salvaged only by the pretty decent showdown at the end. Marginal recommendation. (by Danton of the HKMDB)

**Challenge (Taiwan, 1997: Wong Kwan)** - This film represents a missed opportunity. It begins with an interesting premise. Yukari plays Bing-Bing, an experienced contract killer known as "The Rose" who has taken her younger student and protege as a lover. Instead of exploring the territory of "Naked Killer," a sentimental sub-plot instead focuses on Bing-Bing's male partner who is known as "The Devil." He uses the large sums of money from his hits to care for his crippled mother and senile father, as well as seeking to repay the kindness and affection of Wendy - a young woman who helped the family through extreme poverty, and who now loves him.

It seems this family (and the movie) could really use a social worker like Fan Yu Ling from "A Punch To Revenge" to straighten things out! We are never told why Bing-Bing loves her younger student, who has a great physique and is an excellent martial artist but is otherwise wooden and remote. For a killer, Bing-Bing is also an unusually soft and feminine character. It all simply doesn't fit well together, and during the love scenes Yukari appears to act in the same way one might show affection to a relative or a pet - cheerful, but not particularly passionate. She should really stay away from this.

The main plot involves Sazaki Giro, a Japanese businessman who seeks revenge on his two Hong Kong business associates Kay Chen and Brian Kao. Fifteen years previously they had murdered his father and stolen his money. Chen and Kao, in turn, are rivals in the clothing business, and have hired The Devil and The Rose, respectively to assassinate their respective rivals' fabric suppliers. A series of hits ensue, and Sazaki's men also make an unsuccessful attempt to kill the contract killers as part of his scheme for revenge. Because of their code of "honor" The Devil and The Rose only perform contracted killings and spare several of their attackers as well as rescuing Sazaki himself from ritual suicide. When Kao issues a formal "challenge" to his rival Chen, each of the contract killers suspects they will have to face their lover in a fight to the death.

The first half of the film is quite entertaining, with several well executed one-to-one fight sequences. Yukari appears in quite good form, although perhaps not taking as much physical punishment as usual. Connoisseurs of Yukari's more vicious moments may savor one of her hits - a shocking, point-blank abdominal multiple shooting. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Champions, The (Hong Kong, 1983: Brandy Yuen)** - A sufficiently-talented action director can make a martial arts movie out of almost banal activity, if he puts his mind to it. Films like *Shogun and the Little Kitchen* and *The Chinese Feast* married martial arts and cooking sensibilities. The *God of Gamblers* films were able to mix kung fu with mahjong and roulette, when they weren't busy having shoot-outs and inane comedy. *The Magnificent Butcher* has a classic kung fu calligraphy scene and *The Mystery of Chess Boxing* was able to derive a kung fu style from Chinese chess. Not bad for shaking things up.

Then there are those films that try to combine martial arts with other sports. Back in 2001, Stephen Chow made the hugely successful *Shaolin Soccer*, which mixed martial arts, soccer, and CGI to create sport sequences that looked as if the soccer players were the cast of *Dragonball Z*. It took several years for filmmakers to follow in suit, but we eventually got *Kung Fu Dunk*, *Kung Fu Hip Hop*, *Beach Spike*, and the violent Thai film *Fire Ball*. Some neophytes to Asian cult cinema may think that *Shaolin Soccer* was the first film to do this, but those people would be wrong. 18 years before Stephen Chow box-office smash reached theaters, Brandy Yuen (brother of Yuen Woo-Ping) and Yuen Biao (no relation to the Yuen Clan) came out with *The Champions*, the original kung fu soccer movie.

Yuen Biao plays a country bumpkin who knows a little kung fu and happens to be an acrobat of considerable prowess. He ends up going to the city where he becomes the towel boy for a popular soccer team, whose star player is played by Dick Wei. One day Yuen is asked to take Dick's place during a game the latter hopes to throw. Unfortunately, Yuen is unaware of this fact and ends up kicking up a storm, thus winning the game and earning his teammates' ire. After a big fight between Yuen and his teammates, he defects to a rival team and brings a friend of his (Cheung Kwok-Keung) onboard. Together, they lead their new team to the championships against Dick's team.

That's the plot in a nutshell, although I'm leaving out a lot of details. Some of them I didn't catch on because the film I watched was in Chinese with Japanese subtitles. Also, like a lot of action-comedies made in Hong Kong during the 1980s, there are A LOT of random asides and non-sequitur sight gags, a romantic subplot involving Moon Lee (whom Yuen Biao got to sleep with in the English version of *Zu: Warriors from Magic Mountain*) that disappears as quickly as it's brought up. My favorite random sequence is a scene set in a restaurant, where rivals Dick Wei and Cheung Kwok-Keung are dancing the tango with their respective girls, while secretly trying to beat each other up. It's a wonderfully-choreographed and funny sequence that would be copied later on in Yuen Biao's *Shanghai*, *Shanghai*(1990).

Most of the action is relegated to the football field, which is fine. *The Champions* is a kung fu soccer film, after all. There are lots of flying kicks, Pelé-inspired bicycle kicks, and painful-looking falls on display. Unlike *Shaolin Soccer*, which was dependent on special FX, the sports sequences here are more about showing of the physicality of the performers.

However, if you're more of a fight person, there are some brawls here and there to be seen. An early scene has Yuen Biao fighting off some petty thieves when he arrives in THE CITY. A couple of early soccer matches end in brawls between Yuen Biao and the other players. There's one out-of-place sequence in the movie is one where a bunch of men armed with wrenches and other heavy tools attack Yuen and Cheung. Yuen gets to show off some of his famous legwork in a fighting context here, but the scene is surprisingly violent. Several of the hired thugs get bloodied up really good and one guy even gets set on fire(!). That's pretty strange, considering the rest of the film is essentially a PG action-sports-comedy.

The movie got nominated for the Best Action Design Award at the 1984 HK Film Awards, but lost to Sammo Hung's *Winners and Sinners*. Brandy Yuen (or any of his brothers) wouldn't be recognized for their efforts until the end of the decade, when Brandy worked with Sammo Hung on the classic *The Pedicab Driver*. A year later he worked as a martial arts consultant on the first *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* film. Shortly after that, Brandy became a devout Buddhist and made the film *Master of Zen*, which follows the life of Damo (aka Bodhidharma), the man who invented kung fu. I think he left the film industry at about that time, even though his brothers went on to bigger things.

*The Champions* is also notable for securing Yuen Biao's popularity in Japan. I've commented before that Hong Kong audiences are extremely fickle people. Evidently Japanese people aren't quite so much, and a good portion of Yuen's fan base over the years has been made up of Japanese people. When the Nikkatsu studio tried (unsuccessfully) to save their studio with a historical epic back in the early 1990s, Yuen Biao was brought on to try to boost ticket sales. Said film was *Setting Sun* and ironically, it ended up being the nail in the coffin for Nikkatsu. Then, in 2002, Yuen Biao was hired to play the kung fu teacher in *No Problem 2*, a Japanese comedy about Chinese movies. Moral of the story: it's better to have a cult following in Japan than in Hong Kong. (by Blake Matthews)

**Cheap Killers (Hong Kong, 1998: Clarence Ford)** - Second one up, was more of a gun-play based crime thriller, with Mike Lambert & Adam Chan Chung-Tai on board as fight choreographers. 90's actioner *Cheap Killers*(1998), directed by Clarence Ford, with a script by Wu Jing. Promoted in the U.K as another heroic bloodshed flick, in the vain of John Woo. This movie is no cheap knock-off, it's very much its own film. I watched the H.K Classics R2 Widescreen DVD release, with no English dub option. Though I'm not sure I could watch a movie like this dubbed, because it's so dark and serious. A very original and at times disturbing view of life in the Hong Kong triads, with a good dose of the OTT Hong Kong visual style of the era. Kathy Chow Ho-Mei, Stephen Fung, Alex Chow and Sunny Chan Kam-Hung are on top form as the leads, with Kathy Chow almost stealing the movie at times. There's also a Ku Feng cameo in there somewhere, though I'll be honest I never spotted him. Maybe I was too engrossed in the flick to pick him out. Decent little flick, worth getting for fans of H.K crime flicks. While the widescreen print I watched was a

little soft in places, it's more than watchable. Look out for Mike Lambert as a blond eye patch wearing villain, who came across like some Arnie Schwarzenegger clone, thanks to the crew cut and Austrian accent his character has in the movie. (by DragonClaws of KFF)

**Cheetah on Fire (Hong Kong, 1992: Yip Shing-Hong) – aka *Revenge of the Cheetah*** - A bunch of CIA/Interpol agents (Donnie Yen, Sharla Cheung Man, Fujimi Nadeki) team up with a pair of Hong Kong cops (Carrie Ng, Eddie Kwan) to stop a team of Mainland Chinese arms dealers (led by Shaw Brothers alumni Gordon Liu) from selling a stolen microchip that can launch American missiles to a crazed warlord (Donnie Yen regular Michael Woods) hiding out in the sticks of Thailand. There's some good action in the beginning, and then the film slows down when Donnie Yen shows up, picking up in the second half when the good guys head into the jungle. The biggest plus is the cast, which is full of talented martial artists (Donnie Yen, Michael Woods, John Salvitti, Gordon Liu, Ken Lo of *Drunken Master 2* fame) and familiar faces (Sharla Cheung, Shing Fui-On of *The Killer* fame, Eddie Ko Hung of *Lethal Weapon 4*, and Carrie Ng, who played the lesbian serial killer in the cult classic *The Naked Killer*). The action is good, but frequently let down by bad lighting during several fights set at night. The big finale has Donnie Yen fighting Gordon Liu, Carrie Ng getting revenge on John Salvitti for killing her in *Crystal Hunt*, and Michael Woods showing off some excellent aerial kicks for being a huge muscular guy.

The scene that many people will have etched in their brain will be the one where Gordon Liu has explicit sex with a hooker so as to take his mind of the fact that his cohorts are removing a bullet slug from his back without anesthesia. (by Blake Matthews)

**China Strike Force (Hong Kong, 2000: Stanley Tong)** - These days, Hong Kong movies are akin to Hollywood films in approach (spend lots of money), but not necessarily style. Back in the late 90s and early aughts, they tried to emulate Hollywood in style in order to make money on the international markets (whereas now they make most of their money on the Mainland). This one especially feels like a 90s Hollywood action movie: the plot is trite, the dialogue is dumb, the male leads are interchangeable, a gorgeous Noriko Fujiwara is objectified to the point she's more of a male sex fantasy than an a\*\*-kicking woman (in HK films, the former is usually a consequence of the latter), the black guy is your typical ghetto caricature (one could easily play a drinking game based on the number of times Coolio says "I could get used to this s\*\*\*\*" or "That's what I'm talking about!"), etc.

There's still some fun to be had with the action, consisting of foot chases, a race car/Lamborghini chase, large scale stunts, and a good helping of martial arts. The main actors (Aaron Kwok, Wang Lee-Hom, and Noriko Fujiwara) are wired-up more than usual, which often looks silly and out of place, but is still kind of fun. Kwok looks better than his peers, but ultimately is outshined by villain Mark Dacascos. The fisticuffs aren't as complex as those seen in director Stanley Tong's collaborations with Jackie Chan, but they're still respectable by then-current HK standards. The problem is that Stanley Tong is a better choreography and stunt coordinator than he an action director, and makes some bad decisions on what to do with the fighting. Mark Dacascos is joined by superkickers Kim Wong-Jin and Ken Lo on the villain front, but none of them get very much room to shine. In fact, the big final fight, set on a pane of glass suspended hundreds of feet in the air, features Coolio as the villain to beat, which is rather insulting. Stanley Tong has long surrounded himself with oodles of martial arts talent and then used very little of it, and this is another example. (by Blake Matthews)

**China Dragon (Taiwan, 1995: Kevin Chu Yen-Ping)** - Although the Hong Kong box office doesn't suggest it, the combo of Chu Yen-Ping and his kiddy leads Sik Siu-Lung (the action kid) and Kok Siu-Man (the fat, annoying one) from Shaolin Popey was apparently hot enough property warrant multiple collaborations. Set in Hawaii, part of our intolerable experience with China Dragon concerns Kok Siu-Man bothering the local residents and those local residents adoring Takeshi Kaneshiro and his mobile food truck. Hassled by local bikers (led by Mark Houghton), Sik Siu-Lung and Yip Chuen-Chan joins the duo from Shaolin Temple en route to a martial arts tournament. Ng Man-Tat is also a professional peeper with a secret. Inject Russians and something nuclear related, lots of wire enhanced action and summing up Chu Yen-Ping's work would be inconsistent but not typically Hong Kong wacky. Chu takes the exaggerated comedy to cartoon levels and although it doesn't always work, it makes for a different experience from his Taiwan perspective. The movie does provides the best energy action-wise with a very energetic sequence of Shaolin chamber training. The Wuxia skills essentially intruding on an uneven comedy and romance is an eye brow raiser and it ranks as a highlight. (by So Good Reviews)

**Chinese Ghostbuster, The (Hong Kong, 1994: Wu Ma)** - Yet another ghost flick from director Wu Ma, and this certainly isn't his best effort.

This is a little variation on the "mortal loves ghost" theme-this time it's the ghost who loves the mortal. Mark Cheng is a-hmm, man whose?-who, coerced by a guilt-ridden widowed client is sent to the netherworld by Lam Ching-Ying, and he lands onto Mondy Yau, a ghostly bride-to-be attempting marriage for the 18th time. It's love at first sight for Yau, who abandons her marriage then convinces her brother, the master ghostbuster Wu Ma, to escape to Earth in order to entice Cheng, and a midjet assistant comes as well. There's a reason for coming to Earth-if Yau doesn't marry soon she will never reincarnate. However an evil spirit is ready to spoil their plans.

The lighting in this film is one of the best I've ever seen, giving it an ethereal look, and there are some innovative ways of fighting ghosts-use a vacuum cleaner! bwahahah :) There's also some inspired fighting scenes, esp. one involving a drum kit, and some interesting camera angles. However, the script is quite lame and the actors all seem half-asleep. You know this film is bad when even Lam Ching-Ying seems bored with the proceedings. (by ElectraWoman of HKMDB)

**Circus Kids (Hong Kong, 1995: Wu Ma)** - This is set some time in the 1930's or 40's it appears. Biao is Louie (d) or Tung (s). He belongs to a circus troupe. Actually, in the opening scenes of the film, he's like a one-man circus show as he participates in almost every act. (For good portions of it he's either doubled or wire-assisted.) Also he has these weighted bungee cords hidden up his sleeves. They come in handy at various points throughout the movie.

The Japs, who are occupying China at the time, bomb the area and destroy all the circus equipment. So the troupe decides to get out of Dodge and relocate. (I never knew just where they were or where they went but they *are* in China.)

Yen is Capt. Tang (in both d & s). As he is chasing a suspect he and Louie have an encounter. He also sees Ellen (d) or Lan (s), a friend of Louie's in the troupe. The heartstrings flutter on both of their accounts.

Louie takes the troupe to his uncle's store which he soon learns has been taken over by a crime organization. He gets in a fight with Mary, the moll of Ken Lo's character (never caught his name if it was ever mentioned). The fight is short and fast and swiftly broken up. (Whoever is playing Mary, she's a great kicker).

The troupe resorts to street-performing and gets harassed by thugs. Biao shows off some really good kicking in this rather short-lived confrontation. Tang shows up and of course blames the troupe for the trouble but is lenient at Ellen's demure pleading.

Louie is lured to a building by some strangers (thugs of the drug gang) where he is told his uncle is being kept. It's really a police station and Louie is used as a diversion so they can free their chemist who's been arrested. (Biao has a good skirmish with the cops and he and Yen even mix it up a little bit. Makes me wish it would have gone on longer.) Louie gets arrested but the troupe, specifically Ellen, gets him released.

Henry, the troupe leader, Louie and Jimmy, another troupe member, meet a former circus partner of Henry's who gets the men jobs at a cigarette factory. The crime org. owns it and is using it as an opium distribution center. Louie runs into the thug who duped him and seeks to take him and the chemist to the cops. Ken Lo arrives to stop them. (No fight. Bummer.) Louie and Henry quit but Jimmy stays on so as to support the troupe financially.

Thugs go to the troupe house that night. The circus kids (of which there are 5-6) take them on and run them off. (1 thug is tied up with fireworks. When lit, 1 of the kids exclaims: "It's a bird, it's a plane, it's flying bastard!")

Louie sneaks back into the cigarette factory and finds arms and opium. A fight ensues and Biao demonstrates an impressive whirlwind of kicks.

Meanwhile, Jimmy's wife has left the troupe to seek proper funding for it. The troupe is lured to a "love" boat (floating brothel/bar) with news that she is there (she's not). Big fight here. Really, really good, too. Louie and Mary go at it again and she's truly no match. Tang shows up and gets in some good licks. Mary gets apprehended by Capt. Tang. (It just struck me that sounds like it could be the mascot name for the astronaut drink.) She gets released though because his superior is on the take, of course.



Jimmy has joined a test group at the factory and is getting strung out on cigarettes that are too strong and addictive as they are laced with opium. He stupidly tries to steal some and is caught, beaten up, and dies. Due to that, the troupe goes to the factory for revenge and confronts the crime bosses.

The end fights are pretty good. Ellen is quite a martial artist. Henry has at Mary which is particularly good and....well, let's just say her high-kicking days are over. Tang/Yen fights Mr. Owen, the British drug boss in league with Ken Lo. That's a really nice fight. Yen displays his classic array of kicks. But the best is Louie/Biao fighting Ken Lo. Pretty heavy hitting fight. Lo shows off some of his own impressive kicking but not as much as what I've seen in other films. The action is fast in places with heavy under-cranking but still enjoyable.

This is a really good movie and definitely one to have. Is it Biao's best? No. But it's certainly not his worst. Any completionist should have this. Really the only problem is the dub and subs. The translation doesn't agree in places and the dub dialogue is soooo out of place with cultural references years ahead of the period setting of the film. Too, the voice actors are so laid back in their delivery of the dialogue I think they're smoking some of those test cigarettes. (by Scott Blasingame)

**City Cops (Hong Kong, 1989: Lau Kar-Wing)** - The late 1980's is considered to be one of the best -- if not the best -- time period for Hong Kong action cinema. Deep talent pools both in front of and behind the camera combined with a burgeoning market that loosened up producer pursestrings created a boom in these types of films, with dozens upon dozens of them released yearly. In a realm that crowded, it's hard for a film to stand out. 1989's City Cops can't quite get to that level, but still provides some decent entertainment for fans of the genre.

The "city cops" in question here are two bumbling officers played by Ken Tong and (in a fairly rare non-villainous role) Shing Fui-On. They're having a terrible time protecting a witness (Michael Miu) who is holding a piece of microfilm that will bring down a gang led by Michiko Nishiwaki and Mark Houghton. So the FBI sends in one of their top agents, everyone's favorite "blonde fury" Cynthia Rothrock.

Or something like that. The story here doesn't have much to go on, and so the film-makers seem to have felt the need to stretch out the movie's running time by implanting what turns out to be very lame comedy, some of which may be borderline offensive to more sensitive viewers, such as homophobic references and AIDS jokes. In full disclosure, the version watched for this review was a English dubbed print via Hulu, so perhaps the jokes work better in Cantonese. At any rate, most of the time, the audience is left twiddling their thumbs waiting for the next action scene.

Thankfully, what is on display here is solid for the most part. Hong Kong action movies at this time usually had ridiculously deep cast lists, with any number of releases being anchored by a bevy of talented performers. Such is the case here, with the international imports meshing well with the Hong Kong stars. Of course, like most of these cheap B-movies, all bets are off during the finale, where most of the film's two-bit budget seems to have spent. In particular, the final showdown between Rothrock and Nishiwaki/Houghton is great hard-hitting stuff. It's just a shame that there isn't more of this sort of thing, so we could have been graced with martial arts goodness instead of bad comedy lameness. (by HKFilm.Net)

**City Hunter (Hong Kong, 1993: Wong Jing)** - Womanising private detective Rya Saebo (Jackie Chan) and his long suffering sidekick Kaori (Joey Wong). End aboard an expensive ocean liner, in search of a Millionaire's runaway daughter Kiyoko (Gotoh Kumiko). Only things take a big turn for the worse, when ex U.S Commando, Major Macdonald(Richard Norton) and his lethal gang of killers, take control of the ship.

*"You really should shine your head more often"*

Big budget Hong Kong action comedy, that team's up the talents of Jackie Chan and Wong Jing, for the one and only time. This movie, to date at least, is Chan's only attempt at bringing an animated comic book character to the big screen. You might wonder why Chan, would take on the role of womanising Japanese Anime character Rya Saibo?. He apparently asked his Japanese fans, to vote for which role they would like to see him play next, and City Hunter won. With controversial adult film director Wong Jing on board, the film was also going to push the boundaries of Jackie usual family friendly PG approach to film making.

Chan puts on a strong and highly caffeinated performance, as the private eye with only two things on his mind. Food and the opposite sex. Ryu Saibo has a libido so large, he makes James Bond appear frigid. When he promised his late sidekick Mikamura (Michael Wong), that he would never seduce his daughter, but take care of her instead.

It causes a big moral dilemma for highly sexed Saibo. From this alone, you can see it's not your usual Jackie Chan role. It's not hard to see why this production, often divides fans, between those who enjoy it, and those who dislike it. It seems City Hunter is one of those films, that leaves you thinking one or the other.

*"My fists are like hammers"*

It's not just Chan's change of screen character, that causes some of the dissention among fans either. There's a reduction in the amount of Chan style empty handed bust-up's. There's certainly no lack of action, is just a lot more gun orientated. John Woo gunplay plucked thrillers, were still a big influence at the time. The star was filming this production, back to back with Crime Story. Which must have been extremely demanding for the actor, both mentally and physically. Rather than putting all his physical energy into one production, he was splitting it between two. Maybe this had an effect, on the amount of high risk action set pieces he was willing to do?.

Teaming up with our star for action duties is Duel To The Death director Tony Ching Siu-Tung. Son of Shaw Brothers director Ching Kong (Killers Five). Tony Ching was involved with the Hong Kong film industry, since he started stunt work at the aged of 17 in 1966. His last project as director, was the 2011 movie The Sorcerer and The White Snake. Despite his long and impressive choreographer's filmography, I've only seen his work on A Better Tomorrow & Duel to The Death. Two very different films, with very different approaches to screen combat. City Hunter is equally as individual as those flicks, but it does have Chan's influence, than the two above flicks I just quoted.

*"You couldn't hit the side of a barn"*

One of first Martial Arts displays we get treated to, is from co-star Leon Lai-Ming (God of Gamblers 3) who plays card hustler Gundam. A former pop star turned actor in Hong Kong, gets to showcase a few nice moves, but he mostly relies on his deadly razor like cards. Which he uses in the same way, a ninja would use a throwing star. Jackie gets to showcase some nice stunts during an early garage sequence. That see's, him evade some angry mobster's wife's, all while having his hand tied. Even manages to do a somersault over a Japanese motorbike. Like many of his screen characters, his Martial Arts skills are downplayed here. Which really helps to make the villains of the story, even more of a threat. That said, it means we don't really get a proper Chan style throw-down, until the finale. When he faces against two overly tall bad guy's in a cinema, he mimics Bruce Lee moves from his Game Of Death scuffle with Kareem Abdul Jabbar. However, for the most part, it's played purely for laughs, with little in the way of intricate choreography.

Which brings me onto the subject of the skilled Martial Artist and actor Richard Norton, who I really should have mentioned earlier. He's on top form here, as the super villian Macdonald, who plans to get rich of the wealthy cruise ship passengers. Just he and his men never planned on City Hunter being around to spoil things. Norton puts on a terrific performance, as the slimy bad guy, who guns down innocent people, like it's easier to him than breathing. He's a real-life Master of many weapons of the Asian fighting arts. Only the film makers wanted his character to use, one of the few weapons he wasn't so familiar with, at that time. Would you hire a Latin dancer, then ask him to perform break dancing?. It's a testament to his skills, and some minor doubling by JC Stunt Team member Mars. That gives you impression he'd been using the Kali sticks for decades. I would never have guessed this wasn't the case, had I not listened to the DVD commentary for City Hunter. Apparently, like so many films of the era, there was a big lack of time too. Had they given Norton time to acquaint himself with the weapon before filming, maybe we would have had an even more impressive final fight?.

*"Your balls are in a knot, relax, in the morning you are going to be a rich man"*

The final scuffle really does up the ante, with Saibo using a variety of weapons, from tonfa sticks to the staff. The last time Jackie Chan would use these classical weapons on-screen?. Macdonald's kali sticks are not what they first appear to be either. With simple fancy move, they turn into double chain like whips. Talking of moves, the way our villains removes his suit jacket, is about as stylish and smooth as you can get. Behind Macdonald, are a small gang of mercenaries, the most notable one being Kim (Gary Daniels).

While Chan mostly cooled off on the big stunt set pieces, this flick still features one of his most impressive stunts. When he runs down a corridor rigged up with explosives. Chan runs the explosive gauntlet, without the use of blue screen. This jaw dropping sequence is topped off by a somersault over a balcony. The explosion's were real, this being the set of a 1993 Hong Kong film. I'm sure it would be shot entirely with CGI, if it was made in Mainland China now.

The veteran Brit-Super Kicker was tied up with an Albert Pyun directed project at the time. However, with Pyun being such a big JC fan, he let Daniels leave his production early. Allowing him to get a small supporting role alongside one of his idols. Despite Daniels lack of comedy experience, he plays a great comedic up-tight fighter for hire. There's an impressive and equally funny segment, that see's him doing a brief demo in his underpants, of all things. As choreographed by Jackie himself, and filmed on location at the Golden Harvest studios. There's not many actors can say, they made their Asian movie debut, wearing just their underpants. Sadly Daniels great Martial skills, are never fully utilised, his later fight with Ryu Saibo, turns into a Streetfighter 2 parody sequence. Though we do get a brief and impressive exchange between Kim and City Hunter, earlier in the picture. Which ends with an impressive kick, aided by the use, of a mattress. There are not many gweilo's, that could handle the rhythm and timing of the Hong Kong choreography. Gary certainly proved here, that he could adapt to both the Western & Eastern approaches to action cinema.

*"Are you familiar with all your pressure point's?, like this one on your back"*

High kicking former night club bouncer Ken Lo, gets to briefly showcase some of his sweet looking leg-work. Playing a camp member of MacDoanlds entourage, in a performance, that would probably offend people in our overly P.C climate. Wong Jong didnt appear to be singling anyone out here, with all the various characters, being made to look silly at different times. Some might say, that because Wong Jing scripted and directed the film, that female characters are often mistreated. They do endure a lot of physical punishment, but no more than the male lead endures with them.

In the case of Chingmy Yau's character Saeko, she is much smarter than Ryu. She also appears to carry more firearms, than a small army. You could say, all the female characters, are one step ahead of City Hunter. In some situation's they often get him out of a tricky situation's. While we do get a lot of leering and smeking from the main character, he often pays the price one way or another. Saeko is clearly an equal, when it comes to dealing with the machine toting villains too. The pretty Chingmy Yau clearly gives her all here and proves she's a more than capable performer.

Former Miss Japan Gotoh Kumiko put on an energetic performance too. There is some footage of her performing gymnastics, which she may have had a background in?. In one sequence she evades a leery Mike Abbott, by climbing atop the ships radar, and either her or a double performs a series of gymnastic moves. Keen eyed fans will spot that the sky in the background, switches from blue sky, to stormy rainclouds between shots. The changeable Asian weather must be a nightmare for guys or girls doing the continuity job. Taiwanese actress Joey Wong Cho-Yin(An Eternal Combat), plays the long suffering Kaori superbly. A role very similar to the one Maggie Cheung plays, in the early Police Story pictures. Joey had a long and successful career in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Japan. Though she appears to have retired from movie making, after her role in 2004's Shanghai Story.

*"Cowards quake, when they face the Dragons Claw"*

I personally enjoyed re-watching City Hunter, it might be a mixed bag, but it runs at a manic pace, and you can't say its dull. We get treated to a lot of random moments, such as an overly long song and dance routine, featuring two popular H.K DJ'S/Singers of the time. Which could have been cut completely from the international print, and the film would still have worked fine. There's the odd Wong Jing humour, that works for the subject matter, but it just doesn't work well in a Jackie Chan flick. Not that I should really describe it as Chan production, it was a collaboration after all. The Wong Jing script/story features random fetish jokes, and a strange nonchalant approach to gun violence. While most of the film is pretty light-hearted, you get people gunned down with little to no remorse shown at all. Which works fine in the confines of a John Woo crime flick, or in Jing's Cheap Killers script, it just feels awkward in a PG rated movie like this. According to IMDB, Mike Leeder has a small role playing one of the casino patrons?, I wonder if this was error on th site part? or fact. His name is missing from the pictures HKMDB cast list. (by DragonClaws of KFF)

**City on Fire (Hong Kong, 1987: Ringo Lam)** - When I saw this, I thought "Ah, that's what Tarantino stole from then. Should be good." 5 minutes later I thought "Hmm, no-one said it was THIS brutal."

I was shocked when, for no apparent reason other than using a phone, a man was stabbed with a large kitchen knife in public. I was even more shocked when a cop got his brains blown out at point blank range for ABSOLUTELY NO OTHER REASON THAN FOR BEING A COP. First things first, however good it is, this film will seem pretty psychotic at first look and you may not be able to take it. I can watch Bullet In The Head over and over, but it won't shock me

any more and there was no sickening jolt the first time but with *City On Fire* there was because there is just no warning whatsoever.

But that aside, the film was certainly deserving of the highest praise. While the action sequences weren't at John Woo standard, I wasn't really expecting much anyway - most of the violence was just in one-off events and really there was only one proper shootout. The scenes were tense though, which is what makes a film like this.

I felt that the acting was very good, but with Chow Yun-Fat in an award winning role I didn't expect less and Danny Lee is also great in the film as the robber with honour. The support was also good with no real weak link as such.

I won't talk about the main plot as that has already been touched upon many times, but the subplot of Ko Chow's relationship with his girlfriend could have been a film on it's own. It's certainly better than some subplots, as you actually care about this one.

If you want to see a great movie and you can stomach scenes like the torture of a worker in a robbery (stabbing people's hands was never so casual) you must see this, but I'm almost persuaded to take a half mark off because I don't know many women who would want to watch such brutal psychotic violence and they are the only ones interested in Chow Yun Fat's naked arse. YOU WERE WARNED. (by Tequila of *City on Fire*)

**City On Fire (Taiwan, 1993: Chow Cheung)** - This otherwise routine low-budget Taiwanese crime drama about two feuding gang bosses is punctuated by several episodes of graphic physical and sexual violence. Mark Cheng plays a police officer who disowns his alcoholic brother "Jay" when he finds employment with one of the gangs – first training dogs for illegal dog fights, then as a bodyguard. Jay is actually working as an undercover cop, but Cheng's character is unaware of this until it is too late.

In the same gang another bodyguard "Chang" is infatuated with the boss's daughter. Although he is spared when he attempts to assault her, he later returns to kill her father and rape and kill her. The distasteful nature of content such as statements like "All women are the same" during a sexual assault is compounded by mediocre direction of the shootouts.

Michiko has an expanded cameo role as Cheng's partner, and possible girl friend "Chia-Chi." Many of these low budget movies seem to use frequent costume changes as distraction for the absence of drama or plot. This is no exception. Michiko appears beautifully attired in a variety of Western and Asian fabrics and clothing styles. She's very pleasing to look at, but doesn't have much to do beyond a couple of brief fight scenes. These are done quite competently. Her principal role appears to be as narrator, by asking questions or musing aloud – in case the audience is unable to follow the story line. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**City War (Hong Kong, 1988: Sun Chung)** - This Chow Yun-fat/Ti Lung collaboration was made two years after the landmark John Woo film *A Better Tomorrow* and a year after the less impressive sequel. Directed by Sun Chung, *City War* starts out (literally) with a bang: a room full of hired killers debate on who gets to kill a man. A female ends up getting the task and shoots what appears to be a blown up black & white photograph of a cop's profile, but then blood pours out of the bullet hole left in the photo.

It turns out the man that was murdered was the former partner of Ken (Ti Lung). Ken is a hotheaded cop near retirement who always clashes with his superiors in the force. We witness Ken's brashness firsthand when he pursues a teenage shoplifter from a 7-11 to a mall eatery. Here the young and scared would-be criminal grabs a hostage and holds a huge knife to her throat. Ken, totally determined to capture the kid, curses and threatens to shoot the guy with no regards for the hostage's safety! Smooth-talking police mediator Dick (Chow Yun-fat) is called in to settle matters and in a funny argument with Ken manages to frighten the teenager enough to surrender.

We then learn to find out that ten years prior, Ken and his recently deceased partner successfully nabbed a drug smuggler named Ted (Norman Tsui/Chu) during an alleyway confrontation. Ted's girlfriend at the time (the lovely Tien Niu) is first seen in a karaoke bar singing a couple of tunes and conveniently Dick is there. Dick (in a surreal Chow Yun-fat moment) decides to join Tien onstage and they perform a nice little song and dance number to thunderous applause! Needless to say, from this point forward Tien and Dick develop a relationship.

Ted ends up getting released from jail and decides to get revenge on the solely surviving cop who busted him, Ken. He also finds out about Dick and Tien's relationship, so naturally the two cops team up to thwart Ted's plans.

Overall "City War" is an average take on the "heroic bloodshed" genre. It has some brutal violence and shocking scenes which are best left unspoiled until you see the film. The Chow/Ti Lung team-up this time though doesn't have the same magic of the ABT films. Norman Tsui steals the show here as Ted and he is so convincing in his part that you root for Ted to bite the big one. The film is recommended only if you're a fan of the actors and of these 80's HK Triad flicks (which I am). (by Glenn Satele of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Close Escape (Hong Kong, 1989: Chow Chan Wing)** - This gem of an action film is what all low-budget actioners should be. The plot is developed well, with unfolding twists and double crosses. There is no comedy, and good editing maintains a rapid pace. All the principal characters are well acted. Max Mok and Aaron Kwok are sympathetic and convincing heroes, while Dick Wei is a powerfully evil presence. Yukari plays both sides against each other, in a story of shifting allegiance. Most of all, the action is truly outstanding!

Max Mok plays a medical student whose older brother, dying of cancer, commits a diamond robbery in an attempt to fund his studies. After falling out with a gang headed by Dick Wei, he is murdered. Max Mok and his friends are witnesses and the actual killer is himself killed to keep him quiet. Max Mok is framed for the murder, and flees under cover. He has a seemingly chance encounter with a Japanese journalist (Yukari) who he initially takes hostage. She appears to befriend him, but is actually a plant by Wei's gang in an attempt to locate the diamonds. In the meantime a police investigation headed by Max Mok's friend Aaron Kwok closes in on Wei and Yukari. She, however, has become genuinely attached to Mok, and turns on the gang. Max Mok, in turn, dumps his loyal girl friend!

After several wonderfully directed fight scenes, they all end up in Mok's brother's bungalow. The final confrontation is among the most physically and emotionally intense fights of any on the recent Asian screen. All the major players are excellent. Yukari is spectacular and physically stunning. Yes, that's her up there close to the ceiling, and later kicking over her own head as she takes a fall. Awesome. Favorite line (Yukari): "I will do whatever I want now." (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Come Fly the Dragon (Hong Kong, 1993: Eric Tsang)** - The first half of this below standard action movie involves a lengthy Special Forces training sequence that is played for laughs but is burdened with too many unfunny jokes. The badly written script relies heavily on the charm of the two stars, Andy Lau and Tony Leung Chiu Wai, who unfortunately come across as merely cutesy. We're half way through the movie and, Hello!, there's a plot. Stop me if you've heard this one before: cute, young undercover good guy woos the innocent sister of a Triad big brother in order to bring him down. BUT - cutie-pie cop falls for sweetie-pie sis and - Oh, you have heard this one before. This movie is enjoyable if you don't mind predictable, or if you're a die hard Andy and/or Tony fan and enjoy seeing them act together. They have good chemistry and it's too bad the script served them so poorly. (by Lori Staltis of HKMDB)

**Coolie Killer (Hong Kong, 1982: Terry Tong)** - Paced like a rabid humming bird, this 1982 low budget gritty action film has received a growing reputation over the years. From the opening scene in which two people are coldly assassinated by a shot to the head, this consistently entertaining film rarely pauses for a breather. When you think about it later, you realize that some of the plot elements (and one killing in particular) aren't really very logical, but you are moving too quickly from one action scene to the other to notice or care.

The action scenes are plentiful, violent and inventive (if silly at times), but they fall very short of the slick gunplay of a John Woo film - and are almost charmingly clunky at times. Part of the reason for this has to lie with the main character played by Charlie Chin. Chin was a top leading man in Taiwan during the 1970's - but generally cast in melodramas and comedies. Action does not seem to be his forte. He looks to be much too awkward and slow to be believable as a top professional killer. He looks so bad during the hand to hand fighting scenes that I think my grandmother could take him. This definitely weakens the impact of the action scenes, but Chin's stern demeanor and steely jaw line give the dramatic aspects of the film a good boost.

Chin is the head of a group of five professional killers - all former coolies - who accept contracts from a secretive middlewoman and then efficiently carry them out. Chin receives an offer to take out two of the leading heads of a crime family, but he turns it down because the targets are located in HK and his rule is to do hits only outside of the colony. Later that night a veritable army of killers attacks all five of them individually in interesting if outlandish ways.

Charlie is attacked in his apartment by a group of roller skating assassins (why assassins would handicap themselves by wearing roller skates is left unknown!), another is skewered by a confluence of motorcyclists on the open road, the third has his throat cut by a naked sex kitten in a hot tub, another is ambushed in a parking garage and the final killer is chased until he crashes his car and it explodes. Only a badly wounded Charlie escapes and he hides up with an old acquaintance and his daughter, Cecilia Yip (looking very young and beautiful in this very early film of hers) and sets about trying to track down the killers to exact his pound of flesh for his dead friends. A cop (Yueh Hua) is trying to chase down Charlie, but eventually allows Chin's hunt to play out. This leads to various well staged shoot outs and a fair amount of blood letting.

The film has a basic almost primitive feel to it that becomes quite gripping as the film goes on. One never really understands Chin's character or to particularly sympathize with him – yet it's hard not to get involved with his relentless search for the killers of his friends. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Crazy Safari (Hong Kong, 1991: Billy Chan)** - Crazy Safari is one of the most hilarious Lam Ching-Ying films I have seen to date. What other film has a mix of Mr. Vampire, The Gods Must Be Crazy and Abbott and Costello. In Crazy Safari we have a good mix of adventure, martial arts, comedy, taoist priest magic and a hopping vampire/ghost. Sifu Lam Ching-Ying has been hired to transport a man and the mummified hopping vampire corpse of the man's ancestor from England back to Hong Kong. Of course they run into a lot of problems when the body is auctioned off in England that lead to the man's ancestor hopping thru the auction room trying to find a victim to bite. Then they take a low budget flight complete with a Guns and Roses banner hanging in the plane's coach area. The stupid pilot runs out of gas above Africa and the plane eventually goes down after they throw all the heavy stuff out like cases of Coke ALA The Gods Must Be Crazy. Then the occupants go out when the greedy American pilot announces there is only two parachutes he promptly dons one and jumps out the plane's door, Sifu then says Do not worry he was only wearing a knapsack plummeting the pilot to his death below. Then all end up in the African village below with Sifu, the other man, hopping vampire and the native tribe as well as a subplot about greedy people trying to get diamonds from the villagers.

The film then goes thru skit after skit of animals vs. taoist priest and the villagers trying to worship the hopping vampire not to mention all kinds of silly Mr. Vampire stuff done Africa Style. A must see is Sifu Lam Ching-Ying roping and riding an ostrich two times in this hilarious film. We also get to see Sifu do some Taoist magic that transforms the spirit of the famous Bruce Lee into the body of the main African villager giving him the power of Bruce Lee complete with Enter The Dragon background music. The other great fight scene is where the man traveling with Sifu becomes possessed by the spirit of a dead baboon and fights like a spastic monkey against the bad guys the diamond hunters. So again another film for the Hopping Vampire fanatic and fans of Hong Kong comedy horror. There is actually quite a bit of English spoken in this film in the beginning that surprised me as even Sifu speaks a sentence only one though in English. This film is a must see and a hilarious African bush adventure like none other ever made as far as the vampire genre goes. (by hoppingghost of HKMDB)

**Crime Story (Hong Kong, 1993: Kirk Wong)** - A special agent assigned to protect a wealthy business magnate. However, when the businessman is kidnapped in a daring ambush, he teams up with a seasoned detective to crack the case. But soon he discovers the case isn't that simple.

What I love about Hong Kong movies is that there's always this rawness to them. For this movie, it's dialed up even further. Now what happens when you mix Jackie Chan together with John Woo's style? Apparently this!

Propelled by a surprising amount of dramatic heft, this wasn't quite what I was expecting. For those of you who kinda dislike Jackie Chan's comedic style (I don't), this is the movie for you. This is as serious as it gets. He still fights and does amazing stunts while using props in the room, but never in a comedic way. Always for survival.

Stunts - 95/100 | There's a stunt near the end of the movie where I legit went like... "This can't be possible. Am I being fooled by a simple trick here?" Still no idea if I got fooled or not. Excellent stuff, as per Jackie Chan usual.

Narrative - 76/100 | A bit procedural and quite predictable, but the main character beats are strong and the finale was quite emotional, which is really something for a Hong Kong movie as far as I'm concerned.

Fight Choreography - 90/100 | There aren't many of them but when they happen, they're gritty, violent, fast-paced, and as usual feature Jackie Chan doing all sorts of dangerous stuff while fighting. Lovely. But enough so that you get an actual fight, you know? The ending fight in particular was the highlight of the film for me.

Enjoyment - 80/100 | This is basically *Tiger Cage* but less action, more plot, and with a more explosive (literally) finale.

The first fight happens when Jackie Chan and Fatso go in Taiwan and meet with their target in a strange building that was obviously just willed into existence by the need for Jackie Chan to perform some stunts! He takes some heavy falls here, impressive ones, but the fights are more like quick skirmishes than anything.

Then back in Hong Kong, they capture a guy and Jackie Chan has to fight him because he refuses to talk. Well, the guy picked the wrong person to fight! Rather short but lovely fight, very violent and effective.

Then finally at the end we get the final fight where Jackie Chan takes on the whole team of bad guys by himself in the basement of a crumbling building, and though it's again not a long fight, it was long enough so that it was actually one. I loved the intensity of it, and I will rewatch it down the line for sure. It's the usual "Jackie Chan is overwhelmed and struggling to keep up" but not for laughs.

I thought it was an interesting turn for Jackie and one that I definitely enjoyed. (by Daxtreme of KFF)

**Criminal Hunter, The (Hong Kong, 1988: Frankie Chan)** - Before the opening credits even begin rolling in this 1988 film, there is a wild shootout between the cops and the bad guys and then soon after a horrific scene in which the head bad guy takes revenge by shooting the wife and child of the cop. This is, of course, what you expect from a Frankie Chan directed film – action from beginning to end – and especially in one that is choreographed by Phillip Kwok. Disappointingly though, after this initial action explosion the film tames down considerably and makes an effort to develop character over the next half of the film until again springing back to life in the last thirty minutes. What is a Frankie Chan film doing trying to develop character!

Hong Kong cop, Danny Lee, and some of his men are relaxing in a sauna when a gun deal goes down in the locker room. A betrayal later and the cops are in the middle of a deadly shootout and when the air clears three of the bad guys are soaking up more blood than sweat. Only the head gangster, Dick Wei, gets away – but after seeing Danny on TV he tracks him down and shoots his wife and baby. Danny spends the remainder of the film looking to revenge his family.

In a mild theft from 48 Hours, Danny gets Eric Tsang out of prison to help him find Wei. Tsang and Wei were partners in a robbery years before in which Tsang was caught and sent to prison. In one of the oddest romantic couplings in HK film, Eric checks in with his girlfriend – the rapturous Nina Li. It's like seeing a lump of coal next to a priceless diamond – but Nina loves him in her way and he rightfully adores her. She is a runway model and Frankie Chan makes excellent use of this in capturing Nina in a number of lovely poses.

Danny Lee and Tsang are a mismatched couple as well and spend much of the film at odds until they have to work together to catch Wei. Wei has rarely been so nasty as he is in this film – a long scar running across his face – and he kills anyone that gets in his way without a moment's hesitation. He comes looking for Eric – and has a lengthy and brutal fight against Tsang, Nina and her kung fu father, Kwan Hoi San. It is a powerful and bloody little scene with all three attempting to protect one another from the far more powerful Wei.

Towards the end of the film it becomes morbidly maudlin and truly bizarre. I assume Chan is going for the heart here, but it just feels very creepy and almost comical – and borders on necrophilia. The film has a couple solid action scenes, but the dramatic sections fall short and the narrative is all over the place. Shing Fui-on also has a solid role as Danny's faithful underling. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Crystal Hunt (Hong Kong, 1991: Tyrone Hsu Hsia, Chui Fat)** – Ah yes...Donnie Yen. He is quite possibly our all-time favorite martial arts performer. With 30 years in the industry, he's been a part of some of the greatest films the genre has to offer. In the 1980s, when Hong Kong was producing some of the greatest modern-day action films ever (i.e. *Police Story*, *Righting Wrongs*, *Dragons Forever*, *Eastern Condors*, etc.), Donnie, working with legendary Yuen Woo-Ping, gave two fan favorites: *In the Line of the Duty IV* and *Tiger Cage 2*. And there's more than a few who hold

his freshman effort, *Drunken Tai Chi*, up there with the original *Drunken Master* in terms of quality martial arts action.

In the 1990s, when *Once Upon a Time in China* and *Swordsman* popularized the wire-fu and wuxia films, Donnie participated in some of the most celebrated films of that decade. In 1992, Donnie had memorable roles as the villain in *New Dragon Inn* and *Once Upon a Time in China 2* and even was nominated for Best Supporting Actor for the latter. In 1993, Donnie and his fast kicking tore up the screen for the all-time classic *Iron Monkey*, another favorite of ours (personally, I think Yuen Woo-Ping got cheated out of the Best Action Design award that year).

In the latter half of the 1990s, Donnie Yen began to flex his creative muscles and began to direct and star in some independent projects, including *Legend of the Wolf* and *Ballistic Kiss*. While these films have received some degree of critical acclaim and have a small cult following, they didn't bring in the bucks the way Jackie Chan movies were always capable of doing. But he kept at, finding gigs on the international market as a choreographer of films like *Blade 2* and *Princess Blade*. He even won his first Hong Kong Award for Best Action Choreography in 2005 for his action direction in the vampire-themed horror comedy *The Twins Effect*.

In the second half of the 2000s, when Hong Kong action cinema had truly reached its nadir that Donnie really stepped and worked his magic. In 2005, he appeared in the expensive wuxia epic *Seven Swords*, which was a box-office success. But more importantly, he set up a partnership with director Wilson Yip and made *Sha Po Lang*, a violent throwback to the Golden Age of Hong Kong action movies, reminding it that Hong Kong still had it in them to make bone-crunching fights scenes the way they did in 1980s, adding in elements of jiu-jitsu and ground fighting to keep things up to date with audiences familiar with UFC. Wilson Yip and Donnie would go on to work on films like *Dragon Tiger Gate*, *Flash Point*, and finally, the *Ip Man* films. It took him 20 years of toiling, but he finally became that proverbial Great White Hope to Hong Kong action, taking the place of Jet Li, who was getting tired of the genre, and Jackie Chan, who's already in this 60s and has since branched out into films that require him to act more than fight.

I'm really glad to see this, since I'm such a fan of the guy. Setting aside any possible Bruce Lee argument, I'm going to go out on a limb and say he's the most talented martial artist of the era. His mother was a well-known Tai Chi stylist and he is especially well-known for having studied at the Beijing Wushu Academy (where contemporary Jet Li studied as well). Donnie, in addition to wushu and tai chi, can perform wing chun and tae kwon do, and has created his own signature fighting style from his knowledge of multiple styles. He's really well-known for being a great kicker and is up there with the likes of Hwang Jang Lee and Ken Lo. His specialties are the jumping spinning-back kick, the jumping splits/front kick combo, and the jumping double-side kick (among others). Most of his movies, with few exceptions (*New Dragon Inn*), features at least one of these kicks.

Unfortunately, to get to where he is right now hasn't been an easy task for Donnie. Like a lot of famous performers, he's had to play in some pretty low-budget features. In the early 90s, Donnie was cast in some low-budget exploitation films, such as the film being currently reviewed and *The Holy Virgin vs. The Evil Dead*. Donnie Yen admitted in an interview that he hated these films and made them so he could pay the bills. While it's easy to see why he dislikes these films, I'm going to stand up and defend at least this movie, since I find it quite enjoyable.

The story is kind of complicated, because there are so many characters involved in it. Well, actually, the story really isn't that important to the film, but trying to describe what happens isn't easy. Let me see if I can do it anyways.

The movie opens in Bangkok with a trio of cops (including old school veterans Leung Kar-Yan and Gordon Liu) trying to bust some drug dealers but end up getting killed in a resulting gun battle. We find out that Trina (Sibelle Hu) was in charge of the investigation and the drug dealers will eventually figure back into the story, well sort of. The lead drug dealer is played by Shaw Brothers veteran Chu Tit-Woh (*Sword Stained with Royal Blood* and *Last Hero in China*), but I guess he dies in a big explosion. His enforcer, however, is played by African-American martial artist (and Donnie Yen regular) Michael Woods, who will show up again working for another set of bad guys...I think.

So there's another rich crime lord who's now poisoned because of black magic and is lying on his deathbed. His daughter, Kitty (Carrie Ng, best known for playing a lesbian serial killer in *The Naked Killer*), and her boyfriend Gordon (Ken Lo, of *Drunken Master 2* fame) want to cure him so they send for Dr. Lau (Tyrone "The Kick of Sticks" Hsu), an archaeologist. Dr. Lau tells them a golden crystal that can cure him and agrees to go on an expedition with his assistant Peter (Tony Tam) to find the crystal.

So how does Donnie figure into all this? Well, he plays Brett, an ex-cop who used to work with Trina but now works as a tour guide (in ridiculous red and white striped overalls). He gave up being a cop in order to please his girlfriend Wendy (Fujimi Nadeki), who happens to be Dr. Lau's daughter.

Well, on the eve of the expedition, Peter has to resolve some business with Steven (John Salvitti), the leader of the



aforementioned drug dealers. I may note here that it's pretty funny that this notorious drug dealer is always referred to as simply "Steven" (that and for being rich, he wears hideously ugly suits). We never know what his last name is, but I guess if you're a *farang* drug dealer working out of Bangkok, your first name may enough for everybody to know who you are. Well, business doesn't go as planned and Peter is killed (but not before getting to beat up some of Steven's lackeys) and Steve kidnaps Dr. Lau. When Dr. Lau turns up missing, Brett and Wendy team up with Trina to find out what's going on.

When Kitty and Gordon learn of the professor's disappearance, they send for Wendy, who's unable to tell them what's going on. There's also a scene during the time that Gordon walks into an office and beats up everyone in there, telling the lead guy that he has two days. It's never explained what he has two days to do, but it does allow us to see what Ken Lo is capable of doing.

Anyways, Trina and Brett are out one day and find one of her informants on the street. They chase him down and beat him up, forcing him to tell them about Dr. Lau. They find out that he'd been kidnapped by Steven. The informant meets a violent end by Michael Woods who then (unsuccessfully) tries to kill Trina.

Brett and Wendy raid Steven's hideout where they get to beat up the lackeys. Brett and Steven get into it but they're interrupted by a gunfight that breaks out between Kitty, Gordon, and Steven's men. Brett and Wendy and rescued by Trina and manage to escape.

After the gunfight, Brett, Wendy, Trina, Gordon, and his men set out to climb the Sacred Mountain to find the golden crystal and Dr. Lau. However, they are met Steven and his men and a huge climax erupts involving guns, exploding airplanes, falling rocks, a chain, and lots of savage martial arts.

Well, that's the plot in a nutshell. It's your typical exploitation film. There's lot of violence and martial arts, albeit no nudity and sex<sup>1</sup>. The storyline exists as solely a reason for the mayhem and doesn't make a lot of sense. I guess it's all coincidental, but I can't say I really care. There are some interesting questions that I'd like to bring up:

1. Did you notice that Dr. Lau was sent to the Sacred Mountain still wearing a suit and tie?
2. What was the significance of that fight scene involving Ken Lo and the guys in the office?
3. How can a drug dealer wear such ugly suits? And why is simply known as Steve?
4. Did you notice that EVERYONE in the movie knows martial arts (not that this is a bad thing)?
5. Don't Steve's Thai girlfriends have anything else in their wardrobes besides pink sports bras and short jean shorts?
6. How did that shotgun fire only one projectile?

Now don't take these as necessarily criticisms. They actually add to the whole fun of the film. I wouldn't take this movie seriously. I mean, maybe you can look at it as a low-budget Jackie Chan movie, just with more violence. After all, both this movie and a lot of Jackie Chan movies have martial arts, flimsy plots, and outtakes at the end...so if Jackie could get away with it, why not Tsui Fat and Donnie Yen.

Director Tsui Fat takes the action scenes into his own hands in this one. Seeing that three of the cast members (Donnie Yen, Michael Woods, and John Salvitti) had worked together in *In the Line of Duty 4* and the first two *Tiger Cage* films, you'd have a pretty good idea what to expect. While lacking the polish of the Yuen Bros, Tsui still manages to show off everyone's talents pretty well in this one. There is some speeding up in fight scenes, but it didn't annoy me. There are also some funny shots where a guy will do a double or triple jump kick and through some "creative" editing and sound FX work, it looks like he's hitting the person 6 or 7 times in one move.

Donnie Yen looks great as usual and in addition to some great kicking (look for a nice triple bicycle kick), gets to do some tai chi and escrima. Michael Woods, a big muscular black guy that looks like a pro-wrestler, once again impresses with some nice agile moves. His final fight with Donnie and Fujimi is reminiscent of his role in *ITL0D4*, as he takes some punishment and then switches into invincible mode. John Salvitti gives arguably is best physical performance in this one, but that's in part because he gets for fight time then he did in his other Donnie Yen collaborations. While his role isn't as memorable as the "spaz-fu" fighter in *ITL0D4* or the swordfighter in *Tiger Cage 2*, he still is very impressive in this one.

Everyone else fares pretty well. With the exception of Ken Lo and Leung Kar-Yan, I'm not sure who else in the cast are official martial artists. Sibelle Hu, who's done a lot of girls n' guns flicks, gets a couple of decent fights. Fujimi Nadeki and Carrie Ng also get in some good moves. So if you like fighting women, this movie has three. Sure, they're no Cynthia, Michelle, or Yukari, but that's alright. Sibelle, Fujimi, and Carrie on speed isn't a whole lot different then Cameron, Lucy, and Drew on wires. Heck, it's probably even better.

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<sup>1</sup> - I'm sure that Tsui Fat and company used up their quota for that in *Holy Virgin vs the Evil Dead* and *Cheetah on Fire*.

*Crystal Hunt* is ultimately an example of how entertaining a b-movie can be, even if it is sort of inept. I mean, it gives us what we want: Donnie Yen, visible fight scenes, some nice 80s synth music, and attractive (albeit not objectified) women who can kick butt. Sometimes, that's all we ask for. And this movie gives it to us in spades! (by Blake Matthews)

**Curry & Pepper (Hong Kong, 1990: Blackie Ko)** - Curry & Pepper are two CID detectives who "don't play by the rules" or take their jobs very seriously, it appears. Dimply journalist Mimi (Ann Bridgewater) decides to do a "day in the life" special on the police, and picks these two as her desired subjects - to the consternation of their superior (talented scriptwriter Barry Wong). After screwing up an undercover operation to bust some gun smugglers, the gang's hitman (played by director Blacky Ko) takes a personal interest in the duo - an interest which they reciprocate. Meanwhile, a love triangle develops which threatens to destroy the buddies' friendship.

To become a big star in Hong Kong, an actor generally has two routes - a dual career as pop star and screen idol, or working really really hard. Stephen Chiau chose the latter, and 1990 was the year when he paid his dues, appearing in 11 films before his breakout hit *ALL FOR THE WINNER* established him as a bankable star (presumably meaning he got paid enough per movie to make fewer of them). *CURRY & PEPPER* was one of the other films from that year, and although the signs of his talent and persona were starting to appear by this point, it's not in the *mo lei tau* style that became his trademark. It's one of those films that shows he has genuine range and talent as an actor, rather than just "playing himself". He is paired in this film with Jacky Cheung... who chose the other route to stardom (being one of the most popular singers in Hong Kong as well as a reasonably talented actor).

The love interest in the film is Ann Bridgewater, who is always quite lovely but isn't challenged with much actual acting in this particular film. Director and action choreographer Blacky Ko puts in a much more memorable turn as the scar-faced villain. Barry Wong offers a good supporting performance, and Eric Tsang... is rather annoying actually.

The film marries fairly standard buddy cop stuff with fairly standard love triangle stuff, which makes for a non-challenging but entertaining enough story that's driven by the charisma and chemistry of the two leads. Jacky and Stephen play well off each other, and keep the film fun to watch. Unfortunately Ann is a bit too weak and airy, meaning that she doesn't provide the antagonism that her character should have brought to the triangle.

Luckily Blacky Ko compensates for this weakness with his character and with some really nice action choreography. He's best known for his car/motorbike stunts, and there is a nice car chase scene as you would expect, but he also cooks up some of the best gun action pre-*Hard Boiled*. It's definitely the action and the comedic interplay of the two leads which make the film enjoyable, not the tepid romance.

The film also earns points for some really lovely cinematography from Andrew Lau. He uses many stylised tricks and tons of color filters, leading to some gorgeous imagery that is perhaps too lush for a comedy film at times. The man certainly had a special talent for capturing Hong Kong the city, in all its neon-lit glory, and the film definitely evokes the atmosphere of Tsim Sha Tsui, making me feel quite... whatever the opposite of homesick is... *awaysick*? (by MrBooth of HKMDB)

**Cyprus Tigers (Hong Kong, 1990: Philip Ko Fei, Luk Chuen)** - Your basic, generic cops versus criminals story (in this case, counterfeiters) with a few elements of difference, primarily the scenery. Dick (Simon Yam), Kid (Cheung Chi Tak) and Climax (Conan Lee) are three Chinese cops who are on the police force of Cyprus, in Greece (who knows how they got there). The film opens with a wacky, unconventional hostage situation which the trio resolves in their patented unorthodox style so that we can see what "wild and crazy guys" they are... then the band of counterfeiters come into play, and of naturally only our heroes can stop them. But they don't seem to be in all that much of a HURRY to stop them... the story is able to spare plenty of time for them to hang out at the beach ogling the women, play practical jokes on their boss in a fancy restaurant, and so on... then every now and then they remember that they're cops on assignment and spend about five minutes doing police work. Then back to the hijinks.

THE CYPRUS TIGERS gives the impression of being a movie in which the film-makers, once they got on the set and started shooting, realized the police plot could only account for about a half hour of film, so they just kept improvising comedy bits on the spot until they'd filled 90 minutes. And none of the comedy is all that funny (well, the restaurant scene is MILDLY amusing, but that's about it). And the action scenes aren't all that impressive, either... just your standard kung fu kicks performed, this time, by actors who aren't very good at it. Then, inexplicably, at the very end of the film when the big traditional final good guy/bad guy confrontation begins, they finally crank it up and deliver the eye-popping action you were hoping to get all along, and you wonder why they couldn't have done this earlier. If you pick up a copy of THE CYPRUS TIGERS a good idea would be to fast-forward to

the final fifteen minutes and just watch that. If you resist the temptation to actually watch the rest of the movie after (or before) that, you won't be disappointed. (by Asian Media Access)

**Dead Target (Hong Kong, 1991: Lee Siu-Wa) - aka *Chasing in Pattaya*** - If a film full of rampaging elephants and nude transsexuals don't do it for you – then what about a film full of nude elephants and rampaging transsexuals? This low budget action film hits just the right notes of goofiness and action with a large element of total weirdness thrown in just for the hell of it. It all adds up to an enjoyable romp along the lines of *Stone Age Warriors*, *Hero Dream* and the *Perils of Pauline*.

In this case though it is not Pauline who is constantly in danger of losing her life, but the very appealing Sharon Kwok, who appeared in a number of low budget films during the 90's and has a great inviting smile. She was married for a time to Chin Sui Ho – and he brings his fine martial arts skills to this film as well. Oddly enough, two years later he also starred in *Hero Dream* which also has loads of transsexuals running about often in a state of undress. Recently, Chin was in the papers for being caught while surreptitiously filming underneath women's dresses in public with a camcorder – but I am sure appearing in these two slightly perverse films had nothing to do with his little hobby!

Sharon receives a letter from her grandfather who lives in Thailand asking her to visit him and to bring along a charm that is the key to recovering a precious Royal Crown that was buried decades earlier. In fact though, the grandfather is a captive of an evil Gweilo – who wants to steal the treasure himself.

On the plane, Sharon first runs into Chin and he continues to show up at other opportune times throughout the film to beat up some bad guys. As soon as Sharon lands in Bangkok, she begins a riotous roller coaster ride through the sex trade in Thailand as she is continually on the run or in the middle of a fight. While being chased by the Gweilo and his many minions, she wrecks a Go-Go bar (in which the scantily clad girls help beat up the bad guys), hides in the middle of a transvestite nightclub show (in which various transsexuals are shown in various states of development!), ends up being mistaken for a massage girl and is put in the display window, has to jump into a less than clean river from a moving train and falls out of a coconut tree. All along the way, she is getting whacked around – but also giving out some good whacks as well. Of course, her character is an aerobics instructor and we know how tough they can be!

But I haven't even mentioned the elephants yet. Right out of an old Tarzan movie, she saves a baby elephant from drowning – and then when she is surrounded by the villains – the baby leads the other elephants back to protect her by stomping, gouging and using their trunks to de-masculate the bad guys. None of this will make you a better person – but it has a certain uniqueness and sense of nuttiness that should appeal on some weird level to nearly everyone! (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Deadly Dream Woman (Hong Kong, 1992: Taylor Wong) – aka *Lady Black Mask*** -Nightingale Wong is a super heroine who loses her memory when her triad boss father is murdered. She is taken in by a kindly prostitute, and eventually takes revenge.

These days it seems like I'm getting in weirder and weirder territory with those *Girls with Guns* flicks. Plagued by a nonsense middle act, I was wondering just what the hell I was watching at some point. Nothing was going anywhere, just classic crime triad stuff but with a story that's moving at a snail's pace, somehow.

And then, just like that, in typical HK movie fashion, everything is redeemed in the final 10 minutes in a glass-filled mansion where impaling becomes standard procedure, the fighting comes around with more dropkicks than I could count, and every object is in danger of exploding violently. And everyone is suddenly wielding assault rifles and grenades. A few claps later, I concluded that it was impossible for me to ultimately dislike this movie.

What about the fights?

The movie opens on a mafia kind sequence where Ken Lo's character betrays his boss, and Sharla Cheung tries to survive his reckoning within the crime family. They fight a bit, but it's more of a shoot-out.

Along the way our main character sees herself losing her memory so of course she's gonna show everyone that she knows how to fight while defending friends from thugs (AKA the classic), but nothing much comes out of it.

There is another skirmish with the main character in the streets, but over in like a minute. Up until, not much happens fighting-wise.

Then at some point all the characters meet in a bar and Ken Lo engages both the main character and Jacky Cheung in a funny fight, the first real fight of the movie.

There's another fight in the streets with thugs and fiery props which was kinda cool, but average overall.

And then we get to the final fight in the mansion where all hell breaks loose, some twin-sister comes out of nowhere, and the fighting starts getting a lot more interesting. Ken Lo fights a bit but definitely not enough, but he does dual-wield heavy machine guns so we have that going for us. The twin sister actually outshines the main character here.

#### Summary

Stunts - 89/100 | Nothing much happens in this movie, but when it eventually does, expect many a props to end up in the Props Graveyard™

Narrative - 31/100 | I've lost count of how many of these movies are about a triad family and their power "struggles".

Fight Choreography - 86/100 | Sharla Cheung Man doesn't have the physicality of other better Hong Kong action actresses, but she gets the job done. Ken Lo from *Drunken Master 2* also sneaks in for some guest kicks, but clearly not enough for my tastes. Also loved that random actress who pops in at the end and dropkicks and roundhouse kicks half the supporting cast!

Enjoyment - 52/100 | Ching's (adequately named, played by actress Chingmy Yau) mom was hilarious, everyone was strange, the story was even stranger, but a "lost memory" plot at least kept it fairly entertaining and straightforward enough to actually keep my attention. (by Daxtreme of KFF)

**Deadly Target (Phillipines, 1994: Philip Ko Fei, Godfrey Ho) - aka Fatal Target; Penal Reconnaissance** - Cynthia Lee (Yukari) and Ana (Yeung Pan-Pan) are HK cops on vacation in the Philippines. While visiting Cynthia's cousin Ben Hung, they learn that he is actually involved in arms smuggling and are assigned to the case, teamed with a local detective Eddy. Unfortunately, the potential of this story is undermined by Eddy's Rambo-like infallibility - he is seemingly invulnerable to bullets and explosions - as well as transvestite "humor," sentimental concerns with Eddy's tragic family history, and an eventual romantic interest with Cynthia. Although there is a lot of action, it's mainly formulaic. Yukari and Pan-Pan are proficient and display some remarkable moves. But their talent is submerged in the larger context. Instead of enjoying their natural skill, the final fight is spoiled by excessive wire work. Philip Ko plays an arms buyer. It's interesting to note that there seems to be little screen chemistry between Yukari and Pan-Pan. Perhaps they're too similar. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Death Games, The (Taiwan, 1997: James Wu Kuo-Ren)** - Every once and while, we martial arts fanatics need a return to the basics. You know, a current movie that, instead of bucking all the current trends and fads, gives us what we want in terms of talented martial arts actors busting out some good ol' butt kickin' without all the bells and whistles that accompany many of the recent, mainstream efforts. Now don't me wrong, mainstream efforts can be good in and of themselves, but after a while, they begin to look the same. It is at this point that the true cream rises to the top.

Ever since *The Matrix* has come out, martial arts in American movies (especially the mainstream) has never been the same. Where fighting was almost always static and bound in reality, *The Matrix* showed Americans that fights could be exaggerated and cool at the same time. Since then, a lot of fight scenes in movies now utilize *Matrix*-style editing and slow-motion, wires, CGI-fu, etc. Even Jet Li, who has more talent than the cast of *The Matrix* and *Charlie's Angels* combined, was thrown in movies where the producers thought that using CGI fu would be cooler than his actual physical skills. Jackie Chan found himself in the same position, at least stateside, as the once great fighter/stuntman/comedian (all at the same time, mind you) found himself using wires and special FX in his American movies.

Now, not all fight scenes in American cinema are following in the *Matrix*'s footsteps. Others are doing something that is arguably far worse. In order to keep the fight scenes "high-octane," filmmakers and choreographers are overediting fight scenes to the point that they can cause convulsions in small children. Close-ups, quick cuts, and creative camera tricks are also becoming the norm for a lot of movies, which is probably worse than CGI-fu. Now, this isn't to say that it never works. I loved the fight scenes in Donnie Yen's *Legend of the Wolf* and they did all of this, but it was more of Donnie's artistic vision rather than an attempt to be "cool" and it worked.

Hong Kong, who once were responsible for most of the greatest fight scenes ever committed to film, is in the same situation. Most of the movies made since the mid-1990s (with some exceptions, of course) suffer from watered-down choreography, over-editing, CGI and wire enhancement, doubles, excessive use of slow motion and posturing, etc. This is in part because many of the actors in action movies aren't real martial artists, so tricks like these make it easy to hide their lack of skill. One of the other reasons is probably because Hong Kong is a very trendy place, and people lose their popularity as quickly as they gain it. Therefore, talented people like Donnie Yen, Jet Li, Wu Jing, and Zhao Wen-Zhuo don't have quite the large market like they used to (in the case of the last two, they quite had the market).

Luckily, there are some rays of sun among the clouds. Since the mid-1990s, a few films have appeared on the horizon that assured us that there are still talented martial artists here who can bust it out and make it look good on film. The most recent example is Tony Jaa, a Thai martial artist who turned a lot of heads with his film *Ong Bak*, a movie that is supposed to be filled to the brim with brutal fighting and stuntwork, just like the old days. Back in the late 1990s, American B-movie actor Mark Dacascos worked with choreographer Koichi Sakamoto and his stunt team on *Drive*, a stunt-filled fight fest that is said to be the best American martial arts film and is quite certainly the best Jackie Chan film to not star Jackie Chan. Other good attempts were Kane Kosugi's (son of 1980s ninja icon Sho Kosugi) *Blood Heat*, Jet Li's *Kiss of the Dragon*, and Jackie Chan's *Mr. Nice Guy* (except the finale). All of these movies gave us the hard-hitting martial arts and stuntwork that made the 1980s Hong Kong movies so great.

So, *Death Games* is another such movie that finds itself in this small, but valiant group of movies that have taken martial arts in film back to its roots. The first five minutes is solid proof to this fact. You remember those old school chopsoy flicks in which the main guy does some forms or beats up some random guys in front of a red background just to show what how tough he is? The first examples that come to mind are Jackie Chan's *Snake and Crane Arts of Shaolin* and Sammo Hung's *Enter the Fat Dragon*. This movie begins in a similar way: we get to see star Fan Siu-Wong engage in not one, but TWO random fight scenes that serve no other purpose rather than to tell us that he really does know his stuff. One fight involves escrima and tonfa (the night sticks that cops use) and the other has him taking on four kicking experts simultaneously. Yup...that's what it's all about.

So after his little exhibition, we get with the real plot. We start off with an older guy getting out of a prison. He basically walks out of the prison and the guard gives him a brief "farewell" and off he goes into the real world. Well, not five minutes later (and keep in mind he's still walking alongside the prison wall and not in any direction that would put him at any far distance from the place) a van drives and the guy, Tong, is forced inside. There, a bald Caucasian man with sunglasses shoots him in both knees. The white guy then spouts off some nonsense about Chinese philosophy demanding revenge for a person's father and shoots Tong in the chest and throws him out of the van. He is found by his best friend, Fu (Leung Kar-Yan, in a non-fighting role), who had come to pick him up. He offers some dying last words about his daughter before finally buying the farm.

Following Tong's death, we see Fu with his two daughters, Min and Jen burning money for Tong. This is Buddhist philosophy that I learned in a country presentation in 9th grade (I'm 23 now so of course I'm going to botch up the explanation). I guess whenever you burn money (they usually use "Hell Bank Notes"...I swear I'm not making this up), it goes into heaven for the person to use there. Money in heaven? Was Led Zeppelin on to something?

While they're burning money, Fu thinks back into how this all started. It seems that him and Tong were small time hoods or something. For not wanting to smuggle with some white guy named Lyon, a price was out on their heads. Tong got captured by Lyon. However, while they were talking, Lyon's little daughter happened onto the scene(!) What kind of a stupid person would engage in gunfights and drug deals and such business with his little daughter nearby? Well, Tong grabs the girl to use as a hostage and pushes Lyon over a railing to his doom. Tong makes a break for it, dodging gunfire in the process. Unfortunately, right as Tong whizzes by one of the doors, Lyon's wife is coming out to see what's going on and takes a few herself(!) Well, Tong gets to safety but realizes that he has inadvertently squeezed the poor little girl to death during the mix-up. So, he decides to turn himself in and Fu takes upon the responsibility of taking care of Tong's daughter, whom he raises as his own.

Back in the present day, we learn that Fan Siu-Wong is Kao, teacher at a small, local tae kwon do school. One day he's running over to visit the florist where Fu and his daughters work when all of a sudden, Tiger's men tries to mow down Fu in a gangland style shooting. Kao helps the three get away from the gunmen, only to be attacked by some more henchmen armed with metal bats, led by Shelly (Kim Maree Penn). Kao takes out the henchmen and engages

Shelly in hand-to-hand combat. He bests her and she lets them go out of respect for a superior opponent.

Kao asks Fu and his daughters to hide out at his school until things blow over. He tells Fu that the reason he had been at the market was because Tong had been the cellmate of his father. Tong took care of his father so when his father died, he asked Kao to go to Tong as soon as he had gotten out of prison. Without knowing that Tong was already dead, he had gone over to see Tong at the florist at the exact moment Tiger's men were passing by. Well, because Tong took care of Kao's father, Kao is willing to help out Fu and his daughters as a sign of gratitude to Tong. There's a lot of reference to Chinese philosophy as far as returning good for good and a life for a life and such in this movie.

Well, Tiger sends his goons out to kidnap the Min and Jen, but unfortunately (for the goons), Kao is in the vicinity and well...lays the smacketh down on them. So Tiger sends his men again to bring in Fu, who's trying to sell his garden. At the same time, Kao, who is teaching wushu at a different school, receives a visit from Shelly. It's interesting, because she walks in the school with a receipt of payment, saying that she wants to learn from him how to beat him. The result? An old school fight utilizing wushu and traditional weapons. You know, our world would be a much cooler place if people would use traditional weapons and martial arts to resolve their differences rather than guns and drive-by shootings.

So Fu gets "invited" for a visit with Tiger and is "asked" to stay. Getting worried about his not returning home, Kao goes to Tiger's place to bring him back. Tiger, a pretty jovial fellow, offers Kao a briefcase full of money for him to keep his nose out of everything. Kao, using that good ol' Chinese philosophy, accuses Tiger of cowardice for buying off someone stronger than him and sequestering someone who is weaker and older. Not wanting to look like a coward, Tiger releases Fu...but no sooner than he does that, he sends his men BACK to kidnap Min.

After figuring out that Min has been kidnapped, Kao once again returns to Tiger's mansion, although this time it's in full fighting mode in order to rescue her. While Kao is taking out the guards, ninja-style, Tiger is taking a few pages out of the Book of Bruce and hiring some top fighters to deal with Kao. After besting Shelly in a sword fight, Kao takes off into the forest with Min. Tiger, however, is prepared: he's brought in perennial Hong Kong movie bad guys Billy Chow and Ngai Sing(or Collin Chou). Billy Chow is David, master of the Thai fist style (Muay Thai, I presume), sporting a shaved head and military fatigues. Ngai Sing is Long (insert *16 Candles* joke here), a Japanese ninja master. That's rather interesting, since Long has always struck me as being more of a Chinese/Southeast Asian name rather than a Chinese name.

The next morning, David takes some of Tiger's men into the forest to track down Kao and Min. Meanwhile, Fu turns himself in to Tiger in exchange for them leaving his daughters alone. You know what that means, right? Kao is going to have to fight his way back home (with some help from an unlikely source) after which he'll find out that Fu is back at the mansion and then he'll have to storm the mansion yet again to rescue Fu and...it goes on like this.

*Death Games* is a very low budget martial arts film that, in spite of its low budget and limited resources (locales, stuntmen, etc.), accomplishes what it sets out to do: show off the talents of its stars, especially its star: Fan Siu Wong. The story is old school: a martial arts teacher getting involved with an organized crime gang. We've seen it all before. It's almost like a 70s/early 80s martial arts movie made 20 years later. The script is interesting in that most of the characters talk in proverbs and Chinese philosophy. Well, not quite. But there's a lot of reference made to Chinese culture and philosophy, especially by Fan's character. It's like being a righteous martial arts master also makes you a philosopher at the same time. Isn't that actually a stereotype of sorts?

I imagine that whatever was spent on the drive-by scene and on Billy Chow and Ngai Sing, that made up the bulk of the budget. I'm probably exaggerating here. However, notice how few locales there in this movie; most of the movie is filmed either at Kao's school or Tiger's mansion. I guess the forests of Hong Kong are also cheap places to shoot a film. Donnie Yen's *Legend of the Wolf* were filmed in the forest and that movie was very cheap as well.

First and foremost, this film is a showcase for Fan Siu-Wong. Fan, who has yet to achieve popularity among the masses of Hong Kong moviegoers, is an incredibly-talented screen fighter with training in both wushu and tae kwon do, much like Donnie Yen. While he doesn't enjoy a lot of popularity on the big screen, he's done a lot of work on HK television, including *Fist of Power*, which was recently released in the States as *Iron Fist*. However, his greatest claim to fame are two movies that are favorites among Hong Kong cult cinefiles: Stanley Tong's epic jungle adventure *Stone Age Warriors* and the over-the-top martial arts gorefest *Story of Ricky* (or *Rikki-Oh*). He can also be seen as one of the cops who assists Michelle Yeoh in *Supercop 2*.

Anyone who watches him in this movie will wonder why he never became famous on the big screen. He has the physique, the skills, and the looks to be a great martial arts actor. Sadly, his career has been limited to television and low budget films. However, I'm happy to report that he tears up the screen in this movie. Traditional weapons, stylish kicking (including some hop kicking that Tam Tao Liang and Donnie Yen have done), traditional wushu,

modern kickboxing, he does it all and looks fantastic doing it. He delivers the type of performance that I wish Jet Li would deliver in more of his movies (poor Jet, he seemed to have caught a break just as wires and fantasy kung fu were the big thing). His character is fairly one-dimensional; he's the type of righteous kung fu master that is always morally correct in whatever he does. It's the type of role that Jet Li could play in his sleep.

Just as much a revelation as Fan Siu-Wong is Kim Maree Penn, who plays Shelly. I mentioned a little about her in my review of *In the Line of Duty V*. She occasionally appears as a villainess in Hong Kong cinema. American filmgoers may recognize her as the blonde girl in the Thailand scene of Jackie Chan's *Supercop* and she was the stunt double for the blonde villainess in Dolph Lundgren's *The Punisher*. She comes close to stealing the show from Fan. Her character is definitely the most interesting, as she has a constant conflict between Tiger, her boyfriend and Kao, a fighter whom she deeply respects. By the end of the movie, she has become one of the most sympathetic characters. She gets a number of fights and gets to fight both hand-to-hand and with weapons. Physically, she's in great shape and has a lot of talent to show off, which she does. The only other movie where she may get more fight scenes is *City of Darkness*, which also stars Billy Chow and Collin Chou (plus Donnie Yen too).

Now, we can't have a review without mentioning Billy Chow and Ngai Sing. Well, they've appeared in enough reviews on this site that there's not a lot I can say. More often than not, they bring a certain feeling of authority to whatever film they appear in, even though they're almost always villains. Billy, who had been working in movies for about 10 years when he appeared in this, is looking pretty good. Some people may be slightly disappointed that Ngai, playing a Japanese ninja (and an effeminate one at that), doesn't do anything distinctly ninja-like. However, he does get to show us that it IS possible to base a martial arts style solely on pinching people. He also gets a few brief moments to show us that he's just as much a kicking dynamo as were some of his contemporaries, including Donnie Yen and Ken Lo. I think he does better in this movie than he did in *Bodyguard from Beijing*.

The fights themselves are great, albeit a bit short at times. There are no wires or camera tricks used to make the fights look "cool." There isn't any need to. All the performers are their own special effect, just the way it should be. In most movies, usually the fights build up to a climatic fight, after which the film ends. This movie is the first movie that I've seen that starts with a fight, builds up to a climax, and then ends with a "cooling-down" fight *after the climax*. Well, that's all good. If I have any complaints about the fight scenes, it's that Fan's character gets to be a bit Steven Seagal at times. Nonetheless, there's enough on display that such is easily forgivable. I mean, unlike Steven Seagal, who doesn't know how to portray himself as a bada\*\* AND show off the talents of others at the same time, this movie is able to do both of them pretty well. None of the fights are necessarily all-time classics, but they're all well-done and a breath of fresh air from the usual popular stars who try to fight onscreen.

Are there any flaws to this movie? Yeah, there are. There are frequent grammatical and spelling errors in the subtitles. There's the question of the formulaic plot and logic lapses that often accompany these movies (i.e. why do these guys insist on using knives and hand-to-hand instead of guns and bazookas and stuff like that?). I really liked how the actor that played Tiger used a lot of exaggerated facial expressions to portray his descent into insanity. hehehe Min and Jen are thoroughly annoying and spend most of the movie being overmelodramatic. However, I guess those are small potatoes when talking about a movie with so much skill on display.

So, *Death Games* is one of those movies that need to be made more often. In spite of its flaws, it delivers the goods where it counts the most. Any movie that showcases so well as many people and styles as this movie does deserves great praise. For all of you martial arts fans who are tired of *Matrix*-style editing, CGI-fu, and quick cuts and junk, *Death Games* is ray of hope for all of us martial arts fans. (by Blake Matthews)

**Devil Cat (Taiwan, 1991: Leung Lee)** - Yukari plays a shape-shifting supernatural cat queen who has spent 500 years locked in combat with a wolf. This figure appears to represent rape symbolism. On two occasions the "wolf" term is explicitly paired with two separate sexual assailants. Also, when the wolf spirit attacks her he vows to "marry" her so as to "release" his "hatred." When she breaks off his canine teeth, he returns using both as hand-held weapons grown to phallic proportions - attempting to stab her. Although Yukari defeats him, she is injured and rescued (in her human form) by a kind-hearted man. Yukari then transforms into a cat, and lives with him. In the meantime, his girl friend has witnessed a murder. She is then pursued by the perpetrator - a nightclub owner and rapist. Although the couple flees to her father's home, the gang tracks them down and takes her infant nephew hostage. Although Yukari (in her human form) secretly recovers the child, as well as saving the couple on other occasions along the way, the young woman is eventually the target of abduction and sexual assault. Yukari fights her way through the gang to rescue her and finally kill the "wolf," before returning to her unappreciated, unacknowledged cat form.

Her five fights are brief but quite well directed, although this Taiwanese movie does not have the crisp choreography of the best HK productions. Better camera position and editing would also have improved the fight

sequences. This film is perhaps of greatest interest for its symbolism. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Devil Hunters (Hong Kong, 1989: Tony Liu) – aka Ultra Force 2** - At some point, someone decided to put an English dub to this and rename it 'Ultra Force 2' which is what I watched, though it was listed as 'Devil Hunters' on youtube (In this English dub, 'Devil Hunter' is the Police Superintendent's radio code name.). Neither title makes much sense or difference - it's a police action/drama with a laughably hard as nails Police Superintendent, numerous cagey bad guys and their cronies (I've seen a lot of Ken Lo movies) and of course the hero, an underling in the force, getting chewed out endlessly because things don't go as planned. In this case it starts out as TWO underlings, Sibelle Hu (of course) and Candy Wen.

Alex Man plays the pompous Police Superintendent and yells things like "The whole operation has been ruined by your incompetence!" and "What am I going to say to the chief?" Moon Lee is adorable as ever - it took me a while to figure out what her character was up to, but in the meantime, she kicks the crap out of people here and there and lights up the screen whenever she's featured, which isn't TOO little. I mean, I'd put her in every scene, but here she gets some decent usage and it helps the movie.

Pretty sure they undercrank the camera on ALL of the action scenes, including the shoot-outs and people running, but it certainly spices it all up. Sibelle Hu wears a great deal of noticeably flashy 80's fashion, and we actually get to see some martial arts from her here and not just gunplay and sour puss facial expressions. Ray Lui plays one of the many sort-of bad guys and adds to the short, frantic martial arts scenes sprinkled throughout all the shooting.

The cliches are endless, the big 'reveal' is rather eye-rolling, but in truth, I was moderately entertained by this movie. The quality of the picture was good, the quality of production good, it moves along at a nice brisk pace and there are enough familiar faces in the movie to follow its goofy plot, while waiting for someone to start shooting or kicking.

And the ending? Well, it's a Hong Kong cinema ending, but then the movie tells us, that the stunt people involved were actually hurt in the explosion (which still didn't stop the filmmakers from using the footage)...(by Chazgower01 of KFF)

**Direct Line, The (Hong Kong, 1992: Lin Chan Wai) - aka Golden Corps from China** - In yet another HK police drama, Yukari plays a detective who is kidnapped and held hostage by a team of Mainland agents led by Waise Lee. Called The Golden Corps, they are chasing a traitor who is attempting to sell stolen gold in HK. Despite a promising plot and cast, the action is sparse and much of the story involves the comic antics of both The Golden Corps and Yukari's HK police colleagues. An extended gambling sequence (by which The Golden Corps attempts to raise money to hire and informant) is distracting. Yukari spends a considerable amount of time tied up with a sock stuffed in her mouth, and also flirts with Waise Lee. The movie is somewhat redeemed by an incongruously bloody final shootout. Favorite line (Yukari): "I always wear men's clothes." (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Don't Fool Me (Hong Kong, 1991: Herman Yau) – aka Triad Affairs** - Early 90s HK comedy about a Triad Negotiator (Andy Lau) switching places with materialistic insurance broker (Tony Leung Chiu-Wai), who has found a tumor on his brain. Wackiness and romance ensues as they get used to their new professions. The only action is a brief comic fight between Andy Lau and Yau Gin-Gwok, the Mainland wushu practitioner who played the leader of the Sha Ho gang in *QUATIC* and the lead in *South Shaolin Master*. Yau throws a mean whirlwind kick, but don't go into the movie looking for the fights. There's also a game of chicken played with cars between Tony Leung and Bruce Law, who would later go on to be the go-to guy for vehicular mayhem in Hong Kong cinema. In the end, it's a pleasant, but instantly forgettable timewaster. The most memorable scene is a jarringly violent scene where Tony Leung imagines his pregnant girlfriend getting her hands smashed at a casino, which doesn't belong at all in an otherwise goofy comedy. (by Blake Matthews)

**Don't Give a Damn (Hong Kong, 1995: Sammo Hung) – aka Burger Cop** - "I would like to fart on her face!" "I will give her a fart with noise." "I will make a noisy and stink one." – Hung's sagacious speech on a woman he likes.

After immigrating for a year to the US because of debts and not as successful films, Sammo Hung was back to make this comedy and action film, partially for a favor to two of his sons who have small roles in this. It has been written on several film sites that Jackie Chan was going to star in this but could not do it because of scheduling conflicts



with the making of *Rumble in the Bronx*, but I am thinking this was just wishful thinking from fans and/or Sammo Hung and Yuen Biao. Chan's rise was preeminent while the other two had seen better times. I do not think Chan would have put any serious thought into actually starring in this. Please correct me with a primary source if I am wrong.

I had read several reviews on this film and everyone pointed to a repugnant scene involving blackface\* and stereotypes. Most of the time when I go into a film knowing of the offending scene I often think it is not as bad as the offended write about. However, once in a while like with this film it is worse than my imagination thought like with D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* when it dealt with the Reconstruction after the end of the Civil War. It has one of the most offensive subtitles I have seen in Hong Kong cinema and the blackface used is also among the worst offenders akin to Ed Wood's *Jailbait* which was previously the most racist I had seen. Sammo Hung had used blackface in *Enter the Fat Dragon* but that was innocuous compared to here. It has been stated by Hung that he was obligated to use that scene because of investors, but with his past use I do wonder how true that is. It is ironic that Robert Samuels (Bobby, one of the main hired bad guys) would become the first African American inducted in the Hong Kong Stuntman's Association because of this film. He hurt his ankle pretty bad from a jump during the finale. Samuels, who had a good friendship with Hung as well as lived with him for a period of time, sided with Hung on this and ultimately, except for the blackface scenes, thinks highly of this movie. He was not amused when he first saw this film. Rewatching the ending I do not think Samuels ever saw the offending scenes. His conversation with Sammo and Yuen Biao in blackface seem to be done at different times.

There are a couple of other large issues with the film. First it is highly misogynistic. This is a little harder for Hung to ignore because you can see the misogyny from his first-released film *The Iron-Fisted Monk* and on. Some of the atrocious things Hung's character states in the film I do not think his love interest would have forgiven him for nor for him drunk-sleeping with someone else. Also I am not sure why Hung's character would have an anti-Japanese speech while beating up a defendant, especially to the real-life half-Japanese actor Kaneshiro Takeshi in another head-in-palm scene.

Second, this is also a comedic action film with not enough action. Hung also makes a strange mistake in making his action scenes sometimes resemble the ones in *Ashes of Time* where Hung was the action choreography, by step-printing them making them more incomprehensible to the eye. When you have excellent martial artists on display I am not sure why you would do that. Why, of all things, take that influence from Wong Kar-wai (a director I do like, just not for his action scenes in that film)?

The movie starts off well enough with a funny scene involving two different Pierre Lau (Sammo Hung) and Rambo Wong Yuk-man (Yuen Biao) as two officers, both undercover, are thinking they are going to arrest the other. Blacky Ko is the "stupid" robber who is about to rob a busload full of cops with guns with his own knife. Then things get a little sticky when Yuen Biao's character kicks a chair out under a prostitute. It was not funny nor was it really deserved. Often the scenes with women have that hostility toward them. I do wonder how much his divorce in the year before was a catalyst to this. It is too bad because there are funny scenes throughout the movie like the Superman/Spiderman cop/robber scenes. Enter Inspector Tang Chuen Shek (Kaneshiro Takeshi) who is assigned Pierre Lau. Anyways they are successful in retrieving a large amount of drugs from a Japanese dealer (Kelvin Wong Siu). Of course that dealer wants those drugs back. Meanwhile those men are also looking for love in all the wrong places with a very funny highlight of Yuen Biao munching on roses.

There are a few good gags and some decent fighting. Just not enough of them. The racism and sexism do make you forget that there is not much of a plot here. However, this will probably remain the low-point in Sammo Hung's career. It is almost like he does not give a damn. But to be fair most likely he did not have *carte blanche* in his direction. For those who have not seen this I imagine the locker room fight scene between Biao and Hung is the scene of most interest though it too is marred by an incredibly stupid Hung pulling a gun. This film actually gets worse the more you see it with the exception of the last couple of sequences. The fighting between Bobby Samuels, Sammo Hung and eventually Collin Chou is pretty good and so is the Yuen Biao vs. Habby Heske and Roy Filler. Surprisingly I like the very ending. It is like a more playful *Taste of Cherry* (1997: I am sure Abbas Kiarostami is a closet Hung fan, do not quote me on this). So I highly recommend this to people who are trying to complete Sammo Hung's Filmography. He has so many good films in his oeuvre and luckily *Pedicab Driver* just came out on DVD (Warner Brothers MOD). Watch or rewatch that or *Knockabout* instead.

I have a Mandarin only copy of this from Thundermedia. It has burnt in Chinese and English subtitles, but it is widescreen. The quality is decent and certainly better than the Videoasia's *Burger Cop* release which plays both the Mandarin and Cantonese tracks at the same time (obviously ported from a VCD.) There are no extras.

\* A book could be written on the use of blackface in pre-Hollywood and Hollywood films. While it is rightfully considered at best passé and racist at its worst you can see interesting use in modern day examples like Sidney Poitier's use in *Stir Crazy* (1980) or one of my favorite comedies in Ben Stiller's *Tropic Thunder* (2008).

#### Notes/Questions:

There are jokes to the upcoming handover. I always find this fascinating with pre-handover HK films.

If anyone can find more information and/or interviews on this movie please post.

Has any other actor consistently had more bad haircuts than Sammo Hung?

#### Sources:

Robert Samuels Interview (2/2013) King of Kung Fu Interview: talks about injuring ankle after jumping off one of the racks in the yard. He seems to be high on the film even though he was not happy with the racial issues. This is the film which he earned his HK stuntman's membership. "There was a scene in Don't Give a Damn where I escape the police station. I had to do a 100 yard dash jump over a fence and into a moving car. Sammo told me if I completed this stunt he would sign for me. It took me two takes only. That day Yuen Baio Lau chia Wing and Cho Wing were there watching the scene they said Bobby you earned your stuntman's membership. That day I took 4 signatures to the Association becoming the first African American inducted to the Hong Kong Stuntman's Assoc. I then was inducted into the A.S.S.A Asia Sports Stars Association and then inducted into the Hong Kong Performing Artist Guild" (by Masterofoneinchpunch of KFF)

**Double Sin (Hong Kong, 1999: Albert Law) - aka *Shed No Tears*** - Zhao Yuan Zhi is an HK insurance investigator who falls foul of the law during a visit to Shenzhen. Thrown in jail by the Gong-an, he is surprised to learn that the local Chief of the People's Police is a woman (Yukari). He asks "How can a girl be Chief Officer." Viewers accustomed to the paranoia about 1997 in HK movies and the anticipated negative impact of Chinese rule may be interested by this Mainland perspective on the negative impact of Hong Kong capitalism, corruption and bourgeois values. Zhao finds he has to park his human rights at the door. Confession and repentance are expected, or he can languish in jail. To his alarm, he is sent back to Shenzhen by his insurance company.

The boss of his insurance company is actually involved in a conspiracy with Yang Ding Tian, a wealthy HK businessman, to stage the robbery of a large diamond and present a fraudulent insurance claim. Fan Zi Hua is the robber who pulls off the feat, only to be quickly identified and hunted by Zhao, Yang and the Gong-an. When Fan is killed, Zhao is framed for the murder. He is again arrested. This time Yukari uses him as bait to catch Yang, who in the meantime is double-crossed by his own scheming wife. In the end, The People (in the form of Yukari) triumph. The principal bad guys are killed, and Yang's wife and her business partner are arrested. Doubtless, death sentences await.

Yukari appears rather rumpled and middle aged. Even though she only has two brief fight scenes, she can still throw a nice combination kick and strong elbow strike. After all these years she probably now has to protect her hands, so doesn't punch as much (she carefully tapes her knuckles before fighting in the recent "Leopard Hunting," for example). Even though Gong-an doesn't appear very efficient, Yukari is very direct with the rather drab, white-shirted young men in her department. There's not a trace of sexism or comedy in this movie. With her cutting looks and deadpan style Yukari is perfectly suited to the part of a dedicated, ordinary, yet potentially lethal civil servant. Favorite line (Yukari): "You will die. Are you afraid?" (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Downtown Torpedoes (Hong Kong, 1997: Teddy Chan)** - I suppose the big stumbling block on my way to becoming an ultra-cool international spy and man of mystery is that I'm not very cool. I may be "ultra" many things, but cool would not be among them. That and the fact that I don't have millions upon millions of dollars at my disposal and I have never met, let alone romanced a baroness. Hell, I don't even know how you get to be a baroness. Oh sure, you marry a baron, but what the hell? What do these guys do? I mean, the Red Baron was a World War One flying ace and famed pizza chef, but I think today's generation of barons spend less time in biplane dogfights over No Man's Land than they did back in 1915. I guess barons and baronesses these days just while away the hours speeding around Monaco in wee little convertible sports cars.

Still, I've always dreamed of that daring life, though I've also dreamed of being a fireman, an astronaut, and a guy with the power to decide who lives and who dies. If I can't be a spy, then I'll do the next best thing, which is sit around in my underwear eating Bagel Bites and watching spy movies.

It's probably no shock to anyone that I consider the spy films of the 1960s to be vastly superior to the big budget special effects blockbusters that litter the genre these days. Though often quite absurd, the spy films of the 1960s placed a great deal of value on cool characters, even if they were one-dimensional, and cool situations. There was an obvious swankiness about everything that could never be recaptured these days, especially since the focus is on computer generated special effects far more than it is on characters and sassiness. I try and try to get excited, but nothing about Tom Cruise goofing off in front a blue screen interests me. I like my spy films to look real despite their more fantastic elements, and I also like them to have at least one assassin who wears a fez and sunglasses.

It's the attitude, I suppose, that really sets the films apart. The spy films of the 1960s wanted to be action packed, but they also wanted to be fun. There were very few spy films that took themselves too seriously. Even the big-budget Bond films always maintained a sense of humor. As the spy film moved into the nineties and now the naughties, not only did the focus shift from cool characters and situations to big computer effects, but the sense of fun fell by the wayside. You watch those Mission: Impossible movies, and they are so grim. Everyone takes themselves so seriously as if they are creating some earth-shattering work of art or a cure for cancer. Those guys from the 1960s may have been one-dimensional, but at least they had that one dimension and it was somewhat engaging. The guys now are so dull and frowny. Even James Bond has become little more than a dry prop wandering from one special effects scene to the next. Where's the warmth? Where's the soul?

When Hong Kong decided to get in on the neo spy bandwagon, I figured if nothing else they would return some of the over-the-top fun and action to the genre since they wouldn't be able to afford to rely on expensive and uninteresting computer effects like most of their American counterparts. And hell, Downtown Torpedoes also had a good director in Teddy Chan (Purple Storm, Accidental Spy), and a great ensemble cast featuring three of my favorites — Jordan Chan (Biozombie), Takeshi Kaneshiro (Wong Kar-wai's Chungking Express and Fallen Angels), and the always enchanting Charlie Yeung (Fallen Angels and Tsui Hark's The Lovers). After all was said and done, I was left with a satisfied smile on my face.

Cash (Jordan Chan), Jackal (Takeshi Kaneshiro) and Titan (Ken Wong) are three members of a slick industrial espionage team specializing in breaking into high-security complexes to swipe important plans, documents, and sensitive information. The opening scene will fulfill your expectations for such a set-up: they go about everything in a really slick and needlessly complex fashion. It makes for good cinema if nothing else. Since real industrial espionage is mostly guys with fake IDs scamming their way into dingy little rooms crammed with wires and computers or rooting through the dumpster outside AT&T in hopes of stumbling across some secret document that was accidentally tossed into the trash, I suppose I'll go for watching sexy young lads repel down glass buildings and make by the seat of the pants escapes involving tethers and crossbows and things like that.

The team is commanded by the enigmatic Sam, who they have never met. After pulling off a wild heist to open the film, the three filed operatives are approached by Stanley (Alex Fong of the Angel films starring Moon Lee and Lifeline directed by Johnny To), a member of Hong Kong's secret service. He's not only uncovered proof of their various crimes, he's also uncovered the identity of Sam (Charlie Yeung) and unites them all while making a proposition. Seems a rogue British MI5 agent plans to steal some perfect counterfeiting plates and use them to either flood the market with phony British currency or simply sell them off to the highest bidder. The big problem is that while the Hong Kong police know everything, they can prove nothing, and no one in the British government seems to be taking them very seriously.

Stanley wants the crew to break into MI5's headquarters in Hong Kong, steal the plates, and turn them over to the Hong Kong government before the rogue agent can smuggle them out of the building himself. Since no one else believes the story, it's likely the full force of MI5 (for the record, that's the British secret service, of which James Bond was, of course, a member) will come down on them during their attempt. Obviously, no one is very interested in taking such a seemingly hopeless job, but Stanley offers them further encouragement by freezing all their assets and assuring them poverty and homelessness awaits them even if a life sentence in prison is somehow avoided. Having no other choice, they take the job.

Cash reckons they'll need extra help if they are going to break into MI5's headquarters, so he contacts his closest friend, deaf and deft young computer hacker Phoenix (Theresa Lee). The computer hacking is pretty silly, though no worse than what passes for computer hacking in most movies. I mean, it's hard to write a good hacking scene, because hacking consists of some out-of-shape computer nerd sitting in their attic downing Mountain Dew and Doritos. Not exactly scintillating to watch unless you are some weird fetishist. So movies usually go way over the top and throw in all sorts of whirling computer animation and techno music to fool us into thinking it's all very exciting.

At least there are no 3D animated mazes and flaming skulls and stuff like that in this movie. It's not the presentation of the hacking that is the problem, it's just the way they go about it. For instance, Phoenix sets her computer up to "hack into MI5," and then just leaves it running. After a while they've hacked into MI5. The hell? Is that a function on that Microsoft Office I've been hearing so much about? The scheme they concoct is suitably ludicrous and involves repelling, hang-gliding, jet skis, mini-sub, and boats. Probably motorcycles too at some point. It's so wildly over-the-top that I lost track of things.

They manage to pull the heist off, but not without paying a high price. After exchanging the plates for all the evidence against them, Cash, Jackal, and crew find themselves the victims of a double cross. Turns out Stanley was crooked all along, and what they just did was rob perfectly loyal, straight-laced MI5 agents. Oopsie! To make matters worse, The suitcase that supposedly contained the evidence actually contained a bomb. Cash catches on

just in the nick of time, and they all manage to leap to safety — almost. Phoenix catches the full concussion of the blast. To make matters even more complicated, since when it rains it pours, they find out that Sam is not even actually Sam. She's an undercover agent who was working with Stanley because she thought what he said about the rogue MI5 agent was true. And finally, Cash blames Titan for the whole thing since Titan has a drinking problem that causes him to screw up from time to time.

So there you have it — everyone who is still alive distrusts everyone else. Stanley has the plates AND managed to turn all the evidence against the crew over to MI5. So now they have MI5 and the occasional Stanley-hired hitmen after them. Not a good day. Maybe they should have stuck to rifling through dumpsters and figuring out how to hack the security on the demo version of Adobe Premiere.

Cash and Jackal agree to work with Sam in order to track down Stanley and recover the plates before he has a chance to sell them. They discover he intends to head to Budapest to meet the buyer, but before they can catch him, they are caught themselves by MI5. Needless to say, MI5 doesn't exactly believe their wild stories. With Titan's help, they manage an escape and then pull what I like to call a "Human Tornado."

See, MI5 completely shuts down all avenues out of the country. Every airport, every seaport, every train, every highway. In one scene we have Sam, Cash, and Titan trying to figure out how they're going to get to Budapest and find Stanley. Then in the next scene, there they are in Budapest with no explanation whatsoever.

It's called a "Human Tornado" because Rudy Ray Moore pioneered the amazing feat in his film *Dolemite II: The Human Tornado*. In that film, Dolemite and his men have a little shoot-out with some racist small-town sheriff and his boys, then run off into a field making ass jokes and saying, "How we gonna get to LA?" Then the next scene is them getting out of a car and going, "Well, here we are in LA." In some prints of the film, there is actually a scene where they get a ride from some stereotypical gay guy, but that's missing from just about every print in circulation now, so for all intents and purposes Dolemite and his men either teleport or run all the way from North Carolina to Los Angeles.

Likewise, *Downtown Torpedoes* establishes that there is no way our heroes will escape the country, only to cut to a scene where not only have they gotten out of the country, they've also managed to get all the way to Hungary despite their frozen bank accounts and total lack of money. And not only that, they've also managed with relative ease to locate Stanley. Ultimately, it's no worse than the gaping holes that pepper most any spy films, and at least there aren't twenty minutes of people peeling off various false faces and crap like that. Still, it's a pretty major hole in the plot, and even the casual viewer will find it rather annoying and sloppy.

Of course, I like to say they were simply picked up by the hand of Zeus. In classical Greek theater, on more than one occasion, the playwright would write himself into a corner and end up with the hero in a predicament from which there is no escape whatsoever. In these instances, they would simply hoist the actor up on some wires and claim that Zeus had intervened and lifted the hero to safety. So don't think of *Downtown Torpedoes* plot hole as crummy writing; think of it as an homage to classical Greek drama.

There's also the little problem with the fact that during their escape from MI5 headquarters, they have to take the chief hostage. When they discover Stanley is in Budapest, they proclaim it loudly right in front of him. There is absolutely no way he didn't know Stanley and Jackal's crew were all heading toward Budapest. Yet not a single MI5 agent, not a single Interpol agent, not a single cop bothers to follow up on this. Instead, for the sake of the movie, they leave the whole thing up to Jackal, Cash, and Sam. It obviously makes no sense whatsoever.

In the end, *Downtown Torpedoes* is energetic and engaging enough to make it easy to overlook laziness in the writing department. In many ways, it's reminiscent of early 1980s Hong Kong action films. They were very often full of lame characters and mile-wide plot holes, but they were kinetic and action-packed and fun enough to make you not care. They also managed to refrain from insulting the viewer's intelligence, probably because, as I said earlier, they treasured the sense of fun rather than trying to come across as something overly important or serious. *Downtown Torpedoes* is less fun and more serious than wacky films like the *Aces Go Places* series, but it manages to conjure up the same exhilaration and thrill. Yeah, the movie is flawed, but what the hell? It's still one heck of a ride.

*Downtown Torpedoes* came out in 1997, a year when Hong Kong films really started to hit rock bottom. It was an historical year politically, of course, with the handover to China. Kind of funny and not unintentional that this movie, then, is about a treasure being stolen from England and handed over to a crooked Chinese official. Read into that what you will. Anxiety, preoccupation with other affairs, increased Triad exploitation behind the scenes — there were dozens of reasons the Hong Kong film industry fell apart. While *Downtown Torpedoes* may not be one of the best movies to ever come out of Hong Kong, it's certainly a good, fun film, and far better than the vast majority of films that came out during the "dark years" between 1995 and 2000, a period from which we're only just now seeming to emerge.

The direction is tight, but I've come to expect that from Teddy Chan. He manages to maintain a tense, fast pace and balance drama, comedy, and action very well, certainly better than they are balanced in the bulk of Hong Kong films. Movies from that city nation traditionally love to mix and match moods and genres, and it's rarely done with much precision or smoothness. Instead, you have fifteen minutes of comedy, fifteen minutes of drama, and fifteen minutes of action in a formula that is repeated until the movie is over. *Downtown Torpedoes* is a much more even film that integrates all the feeling swell into a fast-paced if somewhat absurd and flawed narrative.

The cast is also solid. Jordan Chan is great as always, and pretty-boy Takeshi Kaneshiro is engaging and charismatic. He's sort of like an Ekin Cheng with actual acting talent. Charlie Yeung is also good, as is Theresa Lee. All of them are basically one-dimensional characters, but since I'm not overly demanding of action films as long as they keep things moving along, I didn't mind the predictability of the characters.

Ken Wong as Titan, on the other hands, stands out from the rest. Granted his character is no less stereotypical — the lost hero who falls from grace and must redeem himself with heroics and self-sacrifice to save the others — but he plays it wonderfully, and it's hard not to feel sympathy for his wrongly shunned tragic hero character. Stanley is a properly evil backstabber whose motivations seem to be about as deep as "he is evil and greedy." We're not talking Shiri here, but we are talking lots of action and a movie that is just plain ol' harmless fun.

So it ain't perfect, but then neither am I. If you like to nitpick a film, then *Downtown Torpedoes* will probably annoy you. It has shallow characters and huge plot holes. But it also has likable characters and lots of fast-paced, well-handled action. As with the Hong Kong action films of the 1980s and the Eurospy films of the 1960s, it's best not to get caught up in the particulars and simply sit back and enjoy the spectacle. Even on a bad day, Hong Kong action films deliver tons worth going nuts over, and *Downtown Torpedoes*, while certainly a flawed film, is far from a bad movie. I enjoyed the movie immensely. Part Mission: Impossible, part Aces Go Places, all with a kinetic over-the-top pile of action that concentrates on physicality rather than special effects, making it much more fun. If you are like me, then you are probably not slick enough to shoot crossbows or go fight villains in exotic locales. You can, however, sit back and watch *Downtown Torpedoes*, which is a damn fine way to spend ninety minutes of your life. (by Keith Allison of Teleport City)

**Dragon Family (Hong Kong, 1988: Lau Kar-Wing)** - This triad thriller/heroic bloodshed actioner is notable for being directed by Lau Kar Wing with action direction duties being picked up by his brother Lau Kar Leung.

Alan Tam, at his career peak, is joined by then rising stars Andy Lau and Max Mok (all of whom play their roles competently) in what begins as a formulaic, although engaging, triad drama. The plot centres around an ageing crime boss wanting to turn the family legitimate but finding conflict with his former criminal partners.

The film takes a sudden violent turn at the halfway mark when all hell seems to break loose. The action in the final reel comes the closest I've seen to what can truly be described as 'kung fu with guns' as the last few surviving heroes face scores of villains. Like many Hong Kong films it's the climax that makes this unmissable. (by John Richards of Wasted Life)

**Dragon Fight (Hong Kong, 1987: Billy Tang)** - Jet Li and Dick Wei play two Olympic Martial Arts champions who are in San Francisco to display their skills along with the troop. Upon leaving the country, Li (Ah Lap in the movie) finds out that Wei, who plays someone named Wai, wishes to stay in America. However, as the plane is leaving, Lap is too busy fussing with Wei and he misses the plane. What happens then is a stream of events that entangles Lap and Wai in a gang that kills for a living.

I was completely entertained by *Dragon Fight*. I was 2 inches away from buying it a month ago but instead bought *Tai Chi 2*. Not a good trade. *Dragon Fight* is one of those very very few movies that is awesome in the wu shu department, features known martial artists, and uses absolutely no special effects. No undercranking, no wires, and the cuts are used so sparingly as to simply liven the situation. Seriously, Lap and Wai go at it in the end for a good 10 seconds without cuts, and then another 10 minutes of solid fighting ensues after that as well. And for not having any effects, the results are extremely impressive. I'd give an arm to see Jet in more of these kinds of movies. It's as though this one's an ideal martial arts movie.

Since it was a Tai Seng video, the quality of film wasn't left intact fully, but it was still pretty good. Luckily, the subtitles were easy to read due to many dark scenes, and things were actually inferred quite a bit along the way too. I thought that Jet and Wei did a great job acting, as did the rest of the cast, and the movie was very realistic in that it grabbed my attention within the first 2 minutes. Very believable plot as well.

I have to say that I've never seen Jet Li perform so well. *Once Upon a Time in China* and *Fist of Legend* are about the only other movies that I can think of where I was awe inspired by this guy, but what's different here is that HE'S NOT INVINCIBLE! Nope, Li doesn't always throw the perfect kick, and doesn't always block punches. In fact, he gets beaten up pretty well, but since he's the hero he has to win some how, and it's good too because it's still believable. He faces the last group of fighters with a staff, so he has quite an advantage and doesn't pull some "We have to match weapons" crap and throw down the pole. Instead, he shows us an entire life of wu shu training can accomplish. And to start the movie off, he even puts on a sword performance in a theatre. Maybe that's what got my attention so quickly. The director, whoever it was, certainly knew that Jet was worth more than what he had been used for in the past.

Dick Wei was impressive as well. I've never seen someone block kicks with kicks so much. Maybe that's the Tae Kwon Do he's so good at because I've seen him do it in other movies like *Millionaire's Express*. And, as usual, he plays a bad guy and dies a bad guy, which didn't help things. He and Jet, as I said above, get into a fight at the end of the film which is very well done. Although it's not long, it's pretty exciting and the choreography makes the scene very intense.

Overall there were I think about 7 good fights total that I took note of. The first one is at the performance where Jet and Wei do a sword vs staff duel, which is for show. Then Wei fights some people at a bar, which I really liked too. Then Jet fights some guys on the street and does a kick that goes about 8 feet high. I put the clip on the front page so you can all see it. Jet fights Wei and his group in a store. Jet fights Wei at the end, Wei fights group, and Jet fights group. Then there were a few other small bits thrown in here and there to liven things up. I'm glad to say that those 7 fights, except the spear vs sword duel (looked a little too choreographed, as though Dick Wei didn't know how to use a spear) have all entered my collection of fights that I keep on my computer. It's almost a gigabyte now, and I'm picky too.

Anyways, I am extremely impressed with this early Jet Li performance. I hope to see something like this again. I don't like effects in kung fu movies unless it REALLY helps it out, and in this case there was no help needed. Great job Dick Wei and Jet Li and the rest of the cast. (by Eric Jacobus of the Stunt People)

**Dragon Fighter (Hong Kong, 1990: Jimmy Wong) - aka Hard to Die** - The agendas of three women intersect bloodily as they set their sights on Mr. David Lung's (Eddy Ko Hung) criminal organization. Sibelle Hu ("Julie") in yet another policewoman role is seeking redress for the drug addiction, then murder of her father. Carrie Ng plays "Jessica," an undercover agent who poses as "Bill's" (Francis Ng) girlfriend, while Michiko is a Japanese seeking revenge for the murder of her father.

Their paths cross those of the male leads. Alex Man ("Andy") overacts as a petty drug dealer who rescues then falls for Michiko, after tangling repeatedly with his nemesis Sibelle Hu. Alex Fong plays a contract killer from the USA who becomes a rival to Bill for Jessica.

From the opening scene in which a demented looking Michiko lets fly with a sub-machine gun while yelling "Bastard" in a crowded restaurant, the action is plentiful, albeit not particularly sophisticated. Mark Houghton is killed off early as a visiting racketeer. Michiko later practices with a rocket launcher, taking on Lung's gang and destroying a valuable shipment. She displays some powerful kicking and punching, but gains height by climbing on objects and seems to follow relatively basic fight routines. As always, a close-up of her brief look of satisfaction, framed by wet, slicked back hair, is rewarding.

After Michiko is rescued from the sexual harassment of two punks by Andy (Alex Man), she later seeks his assistance after she is shot by the gang. Although referred to as "Jap girl," sympathy for Michiko's character is developed when she cries while describing the murder of her father by Lung's gang.

After Sibelle Hu's father is killed when she refuses a bribe, and Carrie Ng is discovered and shot – rescued by Alex Fong, the stage is set for a final confrontation. The evidence Jessica (Carrie Ng) has gathered is betrayed by Police corruption, and both Michiko and Carrie Ng's characters are killed in battle with the gang. Jessica is impaled, while Michiko sacrifices herself to save Alex Man and Sibelle Hu – finishing off her attackers with the last burst from an AK-47. Following this, the final shootout at a container yard follows a predictable course, and ends in an unconvincing car chase. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Dragon from Russia (Hong Kong, 1990: Clarence Ford)** - This movie is based off of the "Crying Freeman" manga comic/ cartoon series. It has an 80's feel to it and that's fine. (I only recently saw this advertised in another movie so I thought it was more current.)

Sam Hui is Joe Lee. (Hui looks like a cross between Donnie Yen and James Lew to me.) Dean Shek plays his adoptive father who has also adopted Maggie Cheung's character, Amy Yin. Shek had been a student of the "Master Of Death" (heretofore referred to as MOD) who trains assassins. MOD is comically disfigured from years of altering his appearance (he looks like a psycho-Vulcan). MOD decides he wants Joe as a trainee and kidnaps him after killing off Shek (I hear some of you applauding already).

The training sequences are fast and furious and the injected comedy is painful and inane. (I mean it is achingly insipid.) The English dubs are delivered at a 'rat-a-tat-tat' pace and I found it very annoying. Joe is kidnapped (again) by some of MOD's former students and inducted into the 1000 Dragons and given the name Gallant Dragon.

The 2nd half of the movie has assassinations familiar to those in the comic/cartoon series. Amy witnesses an assassination by Joe and recognizes him. Of course he is sent to kill her but saves her instead and takes her into hiding. He spends the rest of the film fending off both those seeking revenge and his handlers who are determined to kill Amy as she is a liability to him. Of course she gets kidnapped by MOD and Joe must save her. The final fight has a butt-load of wirework, quick cuts, and crazy undercranking for a whopping 2 minute climatic fight. (I timed it.) With a knife stuck in his throat (and absolutely no blood spew or loss), MOD delivers a short speech and dies.

As I said, I thought this was a newer film. Sam Hui (a pop singer) is obviously doubled for a good portion of the fights and it's easily detectable. Some of the fights fail but a number of them are quite good. The problem is the editing and the undercranking. It's just *too* fast. But there are some good sword fighting bits with a wakizashi and it's nice to see some nunchucks used. Even though it wasn't exactly what I had expected or hoped for, I still kind of, sort of liked it. Therefore I won't say 'go get it' but I won't say 'don't' either. (by Scott Blasingame)

**Dragon in Shaolin (Taiwan, 1996: Kenny Ha) - aka *Dragon from Shaolin*** - In the mid-1990's, inspired by the success of films like *My Father is a Hero* and a growing international audience seemingly hungry for anything and everything from the world of martial arts, a new sub-genre of the kung fu movie gained a bit of popularity. These movies, which are referred to by some as "kung fu brat" pictures, feature young martial artists showing off their skills, often wrapped in the guise of comedy. Some of these efforts ended up producing quality pictures, but most, like *Dragon in Shaolin*, are bottom of the barrel fare that will have you quickly reaching for the Excedrin.

The basic story has a young monk, Siu-Lone (Sik Siu-Lung), being sent by his abbot to the big city so that he can discover the heart of Buddha. Along the way, he loses his bumbling guardians (among them Law Kar-Ying) and meets up with Little Bully (Kok Siu-Man), a street urchin who wants to use Siu-Lone's kung fu abilities to make money, and Chung (Yuen Biao), an Indiana Jones-type archeologist/adventurer who is trying to protect a precious ancient Buddha statue head from his evil brother and sister-in-law (Elvis Tsui and Kara Hui). Hilarity and breathtaking action ensues.

So the film-makers would like us to believe. Or maybe not. *Dragon in Shaolin*, like many mid-1990's Hong Kong releases, reeks of a quick cash grab, fleeing to the market to make a couple of bucks regardless of overall quality. It always boggles my mind why stars appear in fare like this. Sure, Hong Kong actors make a pittance compared to their Hollywood counterparts, but does that mean that they have to work in a film where a young boy ties a brick to his penis and swings it around, calling it his "super invincible dicky"?

And, yes, if you were wondering, the audience is indeed "treated" to seeing the dicky, not once, but twice, as it is later shown during a drinking contest where the lad has to relieve himself after too many beers. Later, there's also a creepy pseudo-rapey dream sequence featuring the same Satan spawn, I mean, child. And all of this is in a film that is rated IIA, which is like a PG or PG-13 in the US. I know there are some cultural differences present, but this is about as far away from family-oriented fare as you can get, at least in the realm of something that is (supposedly) created and marketed with children in mind as one of the main targets.

I'm sure some of you twelve readers out there would like some information about the kung fu contained here. To be generous, it's okay. Even with Stephen Tung -- one of the best action directors in Asian cinema -- co-ordinating the fight scenes, and Yuen Biao, a legend in the kung fu movie world, having a fairly meaty role, there really isn't much to talk about action-wise.

For the most part, the veterans like Yuen get pushed aside so that Sik Siu-Lung can show his stuff, and it's hard to critically judge just how well he does, since there is a lot of undercranking used, as well as some laughable special effects, especially during the finale, which takes place on the wings of a plane. But even if we had some Drunken Master II level kung fu on display, it still wouldn't be enough to save *Dragon in Shaolin* from dwelling in the depths of B-movie hell.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to run out to Costco to get a pallet of Lava soap to try and scrub the image of an invincible dicky from the recesses of my mind. (by HKfilm.net)

**Dragon Kid (Taiwan, 1990: Chou Tan)** - Looks like a spin off (or a part of ?) Hsu Feng's *Kung Fu Kids* series. This film doesn't take itself too seriously, balancing wacky comedy with high-quality martial arts (in plentiful supply), with just enough plot-breaks to keep some semblance of a story going.

Not a bad effort, as the action literally wanders all over the place. Taiwan, Shaolin temple, Japan, Thailand, just for a start. Colourful, with some stunning costumes, at least for the first 25 minutes, during which time the story is fully set up.

I was very pleased to see my favourite Taiwanese baldy, Cho Boon Feng (Taiwan's answer to Tsui Kam Kong). This guy is a scream, and the only problem is that he has just two short appearances. The three lead martial artists are simply excellent, and the support cast does some pretty good fighting in as well.

This is the sort of film which Taiwan and HK (and, to a lesser extent, the Mainland) can make extremely well, and certainly should do more often. Heaps of ripper high-quality martial arts, mixed with wacky comedy, lots of colourful locations. Warmly recommended, [especially] for those who are seeking another film with the rarely-seen Lam Siu Lau. (by STSH of HKMDB)

**Dragon Killer (Hong Kong, 1995: Lau Wing)** - Before going further in the description of this film, I must first of all tell you that it falls into the particular category of these little wonders of nanars that came out in France from the 70s as a result of the phenomenon Bruce Lee, for the sole purpose of surfing on the said phenomenon by plagiarizing it until the total caricature. They came to us transformed, with titles as glorious as the very famous I go to pour nioo mam on your guts (a little gem if any, whose cinemathèque made us shimmer the projection was a time. never a representative of this glorious institution came to read these lines, I hope he will be touched by my petition: Pity pass it to us, if you have it !!), or even the most obscure No pity for them lame ducks. Not only the titles took a hit but the soundtrack and editing were not spared. Subsequently, with the disappearance of all these marvelous dark rooms transformed for the cause into real temples of cinema bis action, where some privileged (which alas I do not belong to) were able to see these mutant masterpieces of seventh art, it was necessary to fall back on the video (of which we will be able to recommend you some rather smoky titles if a special heading came to see the day on this site). Until the advent there is little DVD, we could believe the moribund phenomenon. But no ! Forces are working in the shadows, and I want to thank them for keeping the flame alive. High technology is everywhere in this DVD, the menu just leaves the choice between the film and the chapters (which are only seven), no unnecessary supplements. We go straight to the essential format 4/3, French language. Anyway, you will understand me this videogram is only for the true aesthetes of Asian cinema, those who have a hypertrophy sense of humor and good taste.

This Anthony Lau Yakusa vs. triad (actually it's 1995 Dragon Killer, thank you Kuro), as the jacket claims, is part of "John Woo's Way". The influence of the work of the great John is blatant in the scenario (if yes there is one !!), and especially in the relationships between the three main male characters. One can see there a vague attempt of scholarly mixing between A bullet in the head and The Killer, but which is far from working at 100%. The film gets closer in the process of exploiting the success of John Woo, the superb Hard Boiled 2 of Wong Jing, by its more than foreign situations. A report also a superb casting; besides Anthony Lau (...) who realizes, we find the excellent Conan Lee (Tiger on Beat, The Weapon Fatal 4, ...) unfortunately here under-exploited but the game so end, Simon Yam (A ball in the head, ...) one of the only ones who does not make tons (well, of course), the charming Cheung Man (God of Gamblers I & II, ...) ...

As for the story as much to warn you right now, it is not about Yakuza against mafia Chinese. It seems that the person who found this attractive title has stopped watching the film after ten minutes, since past the very beginning of the film there is no longer a "Yakuza" alive! The real subject is here, Lone (pronounced "loong"), former Olympic shooting champion (Anthony Lau), arrives illegally in the United States (they are weird these beaches of California, but the film was indeed shot partly on square). There he finds Ma (Simon Yam), his childhood friend who is responsible for organizing illegal immigration for Lee Tai Cheng, the godfather of the local triad. Lone came in order to find her fiancé Mi Yu (Cheung Man - Miou-Miou's half-sister!? Ok I'm stopping) to which he had paid for the trip and since then gave him no sign of life . He will ask for help from Ma, who promises to do everything possible to find her. But Lone will be involved in the affairs of the latter, which will complicate the task and force him to play the gun. First, they will have to face their famous Yakuza colleagues (remember those of the title), with whom Ma shared the lucrative illegal immigration market. Needless to say, the modern yakuza seen by the Cantonese cinema



have no charisma. They even have Americans in their ranks. And after a good wank, we will not hear about the whole movie. On it comes the Lieutenant Sir (Conan Lee, the poor one will never know his name, cop as in Tiger on Beat but more soft unfortunately), who rightly suspects Ma to have stumbled his Japanese partner and want to take the place of Lee Tai Cheng. From then on, he will not stop monitoring his actions. For his part, Lone, in the face of his friend's lack of enthusiasm, becomes impatient to find the trace of his beloved. And he decides to take the lead. It was then that Ma began to use Lone's approach to take the lead. Because he does not want Lone to find Mi Yu, this one having become his wife. The imbroglio is in place, the result will be bloody. So much for the plot of history.

This film is a small pearl for all those who appreciate the beauty that can have, through Asian cinema and Cantonese cinema in particular, the outrageous staging. If like your servant you do not envisage limits to the bad taste (ok, it depends on the days and what one has just eaten) and that you like to satiate you of black humor you will be satisfied. Here is a small non-exhaustive list of some ingredients that give all their flavor to the Cantonese action cinema (but rest assured, it is still not a category 3. It remains a terrible story of amouuuuuuur !!) : pregnant woman molested (even more if affinities), slaughtered animal, innocent slaughtered also (no difference with animals, if it hinders y'a to shoot in the pile) - except that it denounces a little because at one time it is Americans who unscrupulously shoot boat people; a tear of rape, a zest of gore, a pursuit by bike ... We can only regret the fact that for once there are no children in the wrong place, at the wrong time, in the heart of history . Although I'm wondering ... does a miscarriage count? All in all, there is no lack of tenderness. If you add to that a music that looks like a pseudo-parody of that of the Beverly Hills Cop (nevertheless Conan Lee is far from being Axel Foley) ... But it is without counting on the new life that the dubbing in French to this work. The dubbers of the film did a Herculean job. Have you ever tried to overtake a mob who's yelling when you're only three? You will also hear five mariachis singing as one woman! Not to mention the harmonica of Lone that sounds like a Bontempi ... Result: the soundtrack takes such a hit that during certain passages, the atmosphere, the sound effects are nonexistent and only dialogues, more than inspired, real honeys for our hearing, grab our attention to leave us completely speechless in front of so much poetry. It's almost Victor Hugo, so I can not resist quoting some excerpts. Even out of context it's just beautiful.

"- We're going to party to this fucker Japanese, you have not forgotten boss?

- Did not you forget to wash your hands?

- I have a clean tail! "

"Advance, scum of police station, you're an insult to your profession, I'll teach you how to treat the hostages."

As for the realization, nothing extravagant, just a little slow here, and a frame to the nut to put in the tooth. The gunfights remain woosque fashion. As for acting, Anthony Lau mouth during the whole movie (okay he has reasons, but that does not prevent to change the expression from time to time) however in the end he burst the screen . Conan Lee is beautiful. Alas we can only regret that it is so little used. And Simon Yam perfectly fits his role, nothing to say. Poor Cheung Man, on the other hand, does not have a very rich role.

Once again, all this would be nothing without, not one but two cherries on the cake. First the face-to-face burned (and I really weigh my words) between Anthony Lau and Conan Lee, on the one hand. And especially the hallucinating finale, it is nothing to say that it is the rage that animates the protagonists of the story.

Shame on me, I almost forgot to say how informative this movie is. Indeed, you will learn that the toothbrush is in fact the best friend of the Man, and that it is the only essential luggage for any journey. You will also see how to make a porcelain cup sing like a crystal glass. You will also learn how to cut short with the headaches of your friends.

Good if currently you have the hand that trembles on the mouse, and dribble dripping on your keyboard, only one solution: get yourself this DVD as soon as possible. To do this, go to the sites of sale discounts on the net, or search the grocery stores. Recommended price 8 € maximum maximum. It would be a shame to deprive oneself of it not? (from Sancho Does Asia, translated from original French by Google)

**Dreaming the Reality (Hong Kong, 1992: Lu Chin-Ku) – MOON LEE and YUKARI OSHIMA** have been trained as assassins by their adoptive father FOK. The pre-credits sequence details their training at a very early age, and clearly

differentiates the personalities of the two girls/women; the vicious nature of their foster brother and the ruthlessness of their mentor FOK.

My first "Girls with Guns" review around here, and certainly not the last.

I have to say, the girl telling her brother to stop "selling his body for money" was a sweet gender reversal of plot clichés that I thought was lovely (in addition to the context which was also refreshingly different).

So what is this movie about? Well, it's about Moon Lee and Yukari Oshima kicking ass together, Sibelle Hu and her brother (Ben Lam) kicking ass together, and then everyone mixes and matches together at the end as it becomes a clusterfuck of fights, shoot-outs, and cheese.

I'd say that's a winning combination.

What about the fights?

1. So the movie opens on a shoot-out real quick but the first fight in the movie is when Yukari Oshima and Moon Lee take on some thugs in a restaurant. It's quick and works well.
2. We cut to some kickboxing sequence with Ben Lam. They're quite good but the under-cranking is a bit too much at times.
3. More kickboxing sequences. Same attributes as above.
4. We have a huge shout-out in an airport, I'm not sure if people fight in there but if yes, it's brief. More guns oriented.
5. Then more kickboxing but this time it's Sibelle Hu's turn to fight. She pulls her punches because she thinks her brother was kidnapped but then eventually fights for real. Pretty good albeit short.
6. There's a skirmish in a bar but not much fighting going on. Maybe a few kicks. Mostly guns but cool sequence.
7. Then at the end it's the all-out war where everyone fights. Lots of under-cranking, lots of kicks, explosions, booby traps, guns, it's just a mess but what a formidable mess! Loved it.

#### Summary

Stunts - 90/100 | I don't think I will ever give an 80's/90's Hong Kong movie below 80 for stunts. That's just the nature of the beast -- they damn right know what they're doing. Including those Girls with Guns flicks.

Narrative - 66/100 | Flawed but highly entertaining story. My problem is that the 2 groups of characters meet a bit too late in the story and how they meet is kinda contrived.

Fight Choreography - 91/100 | Excellent although a bit overdone on the under-cranking at times. Moon Lee, Yukari Oshima, and Sibelle Hu form a quite formidable trio!

Enjoyment - 80/100 | The characters work surprisingly well and play off each other in unexpected ways. Plus the action is amazing.

But really, Sibelle Hu is the real highlight here. Can't praise her enough in this movie! She's hilarious, she kicks ass, she always has this intensity about her, really this is one gem of an actress! Moon Lee also wasn't a pushover. Thanks [Paul Bramhall] for the recommendation, it was a worthwhile watch. (by Daxtreme of KFF)

**Drugs Fighters (Hong Kong, 1995: Yiu Tin-Hung)** - Yuen Wah once again appears as the head of a criminal syndicate who arrives in Hangzhou to organize drug smuggling operations. In the relatively complex plot, a Hangzhou police officer is sent to Shenzhen to investigate the drug activities of Brother San. During a police raid San hijacks a taxi in

which Yukari's character Yi Chian (a police officer on vacation) and her boyfriend Li Fan are riding. The duo subdue San in a fight in a building stairwell. Yi Chian subsequently rides on the same train as San when he is transported. Wearing a crimson sweatsuit she helps fight off a rescue attempt that is one of two gratuitously bloody shootouts. Yukari's athleticism and convincing combat pistol work are impressive. San is killed, but Brother Pang Fei swears revenge. When Yi Chian and Li Fan join an anti-drugs task force, he lures them into a trap. He is also killed, and his wife, Wu Chun Han, who has been overseeing the use of an ornament factory as a cover for drug exporting, kidnaps and murders Li Fan. After Feng Shiu is wounded, it is up to Yi Chian (Yukari) to finish off the gang.

The final fight is a classic factory shootout between the police and Lin's gang, and features an extended fight sequence between Yuen Wah and Yukari that ranks among her absolute best. During this movie Yukari performs a back flip, and a split kick across her torso to the opposite shoulder! The action sequences are well directed and extremely violent. The plot contains enough twists and turns in the cycle of revenge to be quite entertaining. Overall, this Taiwanese movie is a quietly superior entry in the genre. As an additional bonus Yukari looks absolutely stunning in Chinese police uniform on the laser disc and VCD versions of this film - but unfortunately does not appear like this in the movie itself! (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Eastern Condors (Hong Kong, 1987: Sammo Hung)** - War movies have never been big in Hong Kong. It may have to do with the fact that Hong Kong has no military of its own and has never been involved in a modern war, or it may be that Western-style war movies don't have as much of an audience in Asia, so they don't seem as attractive to Hong Kong studios eager to export films to all nearby nations. There have been war movies made in Hong Kong, of course, such as John Woo's *Bullet in the Head*, but none of them have been big hits.

*Eastern Condors*, therefore, is probably the best war movie Hong Kong has ever produced. It follows the patterns already established by the classics of the U.S. war movie, incorporating elements from both WWII movies and Vietnam movies. Watching it, you will see more or less direct homages to (or rip-offs from) *The Dirty Dozen*, *Apocalypse Now*, *The Deer Hunter*, and *Rambo: First Blood Part 2*, amongst others. At the same time the movie features the style and energy, not to mention the kung fu fights, we have come to expect from Hong Kong action cinema.

*Eastern Condors* has a Hong Kong all-star cast, including Sammo Hung, Yuen Biao, Yuen Wah, Yuen Woo Ping, Joyce Godenzi (former Miss Hong Kong and future Mrs. Sammo Hung), and Oscar winner Haing S. Ngor. The plot is of course designed to allow everyone of these actors to have at least one 'big' moment, even if it is when they die.

The movie opens at a military base in the United States (played by Canada) where Lt. Col. Lam has received top secret orders. It seems that when the US pulled out of Vietnam, we left behind a secret missile stash behind. Now the US wants the stash destroyed before the Vietcong find it and use it for their own purposes. Because this mission is so dangerous, Col. Lam has to assemble a team made up of illegal immigrants who have been arrested and jailed for major crimes like murder. Each prisoner is told that if they get back from the mission alive, they will receive a pardon, a ticket to wherever they want to go, and \$200,000.

Even though the prisoners are loaded on to the plane without knowing what the mission is, the smart one (the one with glasses) figures out that they are over Vietnam. It doesn't take long before the mission starts to go wrong. Half of the makeshift squad parachutes out of the plane before Col. Lam finds out that US command has canceled the mission. Being an upstanding kind of guy, though, Col. Lam parachutes anyway, because he refuses to cut anybody loose behind enemy lines, even criminals.

Soon after landing and hooking up with three female Cambodian rebels, the squad is forced to take refuge in a small town. There they meet Rat, a budding capitalist played by Yuen Biao, and his mentally deranged "brother" Yueng, played by Haing Ngor. They end up tagging along with our heroes.

From this point on the squad ends up running through a laundry list of the bad things that can happen to a bunch of guys with guns in Vietnam: They get captured and put in a POW camp (complete with *Deer Hunter*-esque tortures), they have to deal with a traitor in their own ranks, and they have to cross an uncrossable bridge. Ranks are inevitably reduced until the final showdown takes place at the James Bond-style base where the missiles are housed.

If there is one element in all of this that sets this apart from Western War films, other than kung fu fighting, it is Yuen Wah's performance as the villainous giggling general whose battalion is following our heroes. His performance

is so eccentric and over the top it makes the performances in *Batman and Robin* seem tame and realistic. Between his giggling and fanning, and the explosive delivery of his few spoken lines will make you wonder what the heck his deal is.

If ever there was a film for hard-core Asian action fans, this is it. Bullets fly, kicks and punches exchange, and handy jungle objects convert into deadly weapons at need. This is not, we repeat NOT, a date film - unless you and your date just happen to be into rainforest combat.

Samo Hung stars and directs, so his character, Tung, gets to do the coolest stuff. In one scene he jumps off a cliff and lands in a truck full of bad guys, whom he holds hostage by threatening to pull the pins on some handy grenades. In another scene, he improvises a weapon out of some sort of bamboo or palm frond that somehow fires with enough force to penetrate a person's neck.

Our favorite part of the film, though, is the climatic kung fu fight between Tung and Rat and the giggling general and a couple of his cronies. Oh sure, there should be a plethora of guns lying around on the floor of the base that the combatants could use against each other, but nobody seems to notice them. Instead we get an amazing display of martial arts prowess. This is pretty much the best kung fu fighting we've ever seen -- and we've seen plenty of Jackie Chan and Jet Li films to compare it to. Yuen Biao is one of the best on-screen fighters ever, and the (slightly) slimmed down Samo Hung is amazingly agile and fast. Also, the contestants are well matched, with Samo's bulk facing off with skinny Yuen Wah's fluid and bizarre kung fu style. If you are any kind of fan of HK action films, you must check out *Eastern Condors* for yourself. (by Scott Hamilton and Chris Holland of Stomp Tokyo)

**Encounter of the Spooky Kind 2 (Hong Kong, 1990: Sammo Hung)** - Hung plays Ah Po in this sequel and comes in contact with ghosts, mummies, snake men, and evil priests.

Spooky 2 actually has nothing to do with Spooky 1. Some actors return but act in different parts, like Lam Ching Ying, who plays an impressive role as Sammo's master, and he fights at the end! Spooky 2 has the flavor of an early '90s Sammo film (because it is just that) and despite the low quantity of action, a problem shared with Spooky 1, it blows the top off most HK action from the 90s.

First we have a small bout between Sammo and a vampire. Immediately one can see how much Hung's style has changed since 1981 with *Spooky Encounters 1*. There are more camera dollies, the lighting is softer, the film stock is different - actually it looks worse than that used 10 years earlier, but perhaps it's just the transfer to VCD that gave it a more blurred look-. The scene has a fall or two, nothing major, but it sets up the style for the rest of the movie.

Huang Ha and his little tool of a friend, Lam Man Cho, plot against Sammo in an excellent outdoor fight. Lam Man Cho is doubled for most of his fighting, which is very well paced and edited, not to mention choreographed with Sammo's masterful hand (alongside James Tin Jun, Siu Tak Foo, and Chow Gam Gong, all of whom have miniscule experience in comparison). Lam's movements copy that of a monkey in a restaurant in a voodoo doll fashion. Everything is clean, both have some kicks, and acrobatic moves are everywhere, including quite a few frogmans (a fall to a kip-up position, and then back to the feet). Lam's character fights like a monkey, and it's pretty legitimate looking, especially with the handwork. The whole scene is around a minute long but it's quite good.

Half way through the movie Hung has a hilarious fight against two zombies, one looking like it's played by a kid. It bites at his leg, Hung does falls everywhere (why this sudden interest in falling everywhere? It looks good though) and rips the head off one zombie, which spews out cockroaches. The other scenes with cockroaches are even worse, and when they crawl all over Sammo I wanted to gag. Disgusting.

Huang Ha does battle against Sammo while he's possessed. Ha doesn't work wonders because he's well past his golden period, but he has a couple shots of good choreography. Lots of taoism stuff like exploding dust and the ghost coming out of Sammo's body to do a little fighting only to return for safety.

The final scene first has Meng Hoi, Hung, and Lam Ching Ying all fighting seven or eight mummies. The scene is very cool, full of fun kickboxing and, as mentioned earlier, Lam Ching Ying has some fighting against 2 mummies. It's simple handwork but it's still great seeing action being tossed in with the Taoism magic. Meng Hoi has a bit of fighting as well but nothing extensive. Then the snake fighters come, one of whom is Ngai Sing and the other, I couldn't find his name. Check the pic, if you recognize him let me know. The majority of the scene is Ngai vs Sammo and it's an impressive finale. There's a good dose of handwork involved, Ngai pulls off some cool looking kicks, and there's the fine amount of pure bashing necessary in the standard Sammo fight. The other snake fighter doesn't do

as well. He kicks a few times, Lam and Meng Hoi are beat around and it's over quickly. For the very end, Huang Ha does a little explosion magic on Meng Hoi and Sammo, both of whom do some very high falls that look great.

This is one more movie in the large lineup of Sammo flicks that has awesome action but simply not enough of it. The beginning scene is quite good, and the finale was full of Sammo grandeur. In 1990 he seemed to reach a stage of near perfection in choreography but just didn't do enough of it! I'm sure everyone, after seeing *Cinema of Vengeance*, was looking out for this movie for the sake of Ngai's fight. It's well worth the search in my opinion, and it has some of the best ghost and goblin fighting I've seen in a while. (by Eric Jacobus of the Stunt People)

**Enter the Eagles (Hong Kong, 1998: Corey Yuen)** - Benny Urquidez vs. Shannon Lee? Sign me up!

This is one of those DVDs that has been sitting around on my shelves for years, and it's always on that list of "things I should just sit down and watch this week but then they never get watched." Well, now that I've finally gotten around to it, my initial impression is that I shouldn't have let it sit around for so long, but in a way I'm glad I did.

I shouldn't have let it sit around for so long because it was pretty fun; and I'm glad I let it sit around for so long, because watching it now, so long after the fact, it was like a visit from an old friend, provided that friend is "the way they used to make Hong Kong action films in the 80s and early 90s." No CGI (well, no CGI fights), minimal wirework, actors who are better fighters than they are actors — man, I miss this stuff.

Oh yeah, and Shannon Lee fights Benny Urquidez. In an exploding blimp.

But let's begin at the beginning, or at least what will pass as the beginning for our purposes here. First of all, this movie has a pretty impressive Hong Kong action pedigree. Director Cory Yuen was one of the "Seven Little Fortunes," the group of Peking Opera students that included, among others, Jackie Chan, Sammo Hung, Yuen Biao, and Yuen Wah. I'm going to assume that readers of Teleport City know who these guys are. If you don't know, then you best turn your computer off and go watch *Project A*, *Dragons Forever*, *Young Master*, *Prodigal [Son]*, and *Eastern Condors*. We'll still be here when you get back. Cory Yuen proved himself an able enough actor in supporting roles, but it was behind the camera, as director, that Yuen really found his calling. Although he doesn't have what you might call a recognizable style of direction, what he does do is put the camera in the right place and let the actors do their thing. Few directors were able to shoot the breakneck style of 80s action they way Cory Yuen could.

His first martial arts directing job in 1982 with *Tower of the Death*, retitled *Game of Death II* and turned into an even more outrageously shameless Bruce Lee exploitation film than the first *Game of Death*. What gets lost beneath all the Bruce Lee exploitation, however, is the fact that *Tower of Death* is actually pretty damn good. If you disconnect it from the clones of Bruce Lee movies that plagued the 70s and 80s, then you can appreciate the film for its own merits, which are considerable. From there, Yuen went on to direct a string of what are considered some of the very best and defining Hong Kong action films of the 1980s, including *Ninja in the Dragon's Den*, *Yes Madam*, *Righting Wrongs*, *Dragons Forever*, *Blonde Fury*, and *She Shoots Straight*. From the very first, Yuen's talent really seemed to be for bringing out the very best in female fighters. Michelle Yeoh, Cynthia Rothrock, and Joyce Godenzi were all at the very top of their game under Yuen's solid guidance.

At the same time, he became one of the very first of the big names to attempt with some success to cross over into the American market. No *Retreat*, *No Surrender* may not be a great film, but it was a well-known movie that pretty much everyone rented at some point. It's most notable, of course, for introducing the world to Jean Claude Van Damme. I know, I know...his big screen debut was actually as the knee-squeezing gay kickboxer with a keen sportscar in *Forever Monaco*, or as the dayglo spandex wearing dancer on the beach in *Breakin'*, but *No Retreat No Surrender* is the first time Van Damme got to sell himself as some sort of a martial arts bad-ass, albeit a Russian one.

In the 1990s, Yuen made the switch from straight-forward action to the wire-laden fantasy kungfu that became so popular during that decade, and while many fans lamented the passing of the 80s style of stunt-heavy, wire-free insanity, Yuen never the less continued to crank out a string of mega-hits, starting with the two Saviors of the Soul films but really kicking into high gear once he teamed with the 1990s ruler of the martial world, Jet Li. Cory Yuen directed Li in a slew of fan favorites, including two *Fong Sai-yuk* films, *Bodyguard from Beijing* (which I thought was awful), *New Legend of Shaolin* (Jet Li does a kungfu version of *Lone Wolf and Cub*), and *My Father is a Hero* (featuring the infamous "tie my kid to a rope and use him like a kungfu yo-yo" scene). It was round about that time, unfortunately, that the bottom fell out of the Hong Kong movie industry. Action films were hit especially hard. They quickly fell out of style, and most of the beloved stars of the 80s and 90s were too old or just too beat up to sustain that style of film making. In addition, a number of the most beloved female stars of the action genre either retired

or left Hong Kong to pursue film making elsewhere. And suddenly Hong Kong realized that there were no new Jackie Chans or Michelle Yeohs waiting in the wings, no matter how hard they tried to convince us that Stephen Fung and Nicolas Tse were awesome. Things just weren't the same.

But Yuen soldiered on, and the less he could depend on his actors for solid martial arts action, the more he depended on special effects. 1998's *Enter the Eagles* would be the last film he'd make (for a while, anyway) featuring a cast of able fighters relying on their own skills and the time-tested 80s style of action filmmaking. A couple years later, he would make the special effects laden flop *Avenging Fist*, originally meant to be a Tekken (some fighting video game) film until someone realized they forgot to actually buy the rights to make a Tekken film. After that, Yuen once again found cross-over success in America with *The Transporter*, starring Jason Statham, then returned to Hong Kong to resurrect the moribund "Girls with Guns" genre so popular in the 90s. The result was *So Close*, and while it's hardly *Yes Madam* or *Righting Wrongs* in terms of the quality of legitimate kungfu choreography, it's still a damn fun film.

And since he apparently learned nothing from *Avenging Fist*, Yuen tried his hand a video-game adaptation movie again in 2006, this time with the American film *DOA*. But we'll talk about that one soon enough.

If *Enter the Eagles* is Yuen's old school swan song (and that's only if you consider the 1990s old school, which they really aren't), then at least he aligned a proper set of players for the going away party. Anita Yuen was one of the most ubiquitous faces in 1990s Hong Kong cinema, though that industry's flavor of the week attitude with many of its female stars meant that she went from A-list megastar to B-list mainstay pretty quickly. But she cut her teeth in dramas like *Cie La Vie*, *Mon Cherie*, and comedies like Tsui Hark's *Chinese Feast* and Stephen Chow's Bond film send-up *From Beijing with Love*, as well as showing up to do nothing in the Jackie Chan film *Thunderbolt*. By 1998, she wasn't exactly in demand, but western fans of HK films still adored her, and I was certainly happy to see her back in action, even if she's not exactly believable as an action star (she looks to weigh all of 80 pounds). What she lacks in action cred, though, she certainly makes up for in genuine acting ability.

And then there is Jordan Chan, one of the most promising young stars of the latter half of the 1990s, part of what I like to call the Hong Kong Triad Brat Pack — that group of young actors who all made names for themselves starring in *Young and Dangerous* movies. Those films were the bane of my existence when they first came out, largely because it seems like a new one came out every other week, and all of a sudden all anyone was making was "young triad dude" movies. I actually quite like most of them now, and even when I didn't, I liked Jordan Chan. He was a good actor and he had genuine charisma, unlike Triad Brat Pack compatriot Ekin Cheng, who had great hair but not much else. I don't think Chan's ever gotten material that was up to his ability, but I've never the less enjoyed a lot of his movies, including several that no one else seems to enjoy (like *Downtown Torpedoes*, which is marginally less plausible a story than *Enter the Eagles*).

Both Yuen and Chan deliver pretty much all their dialog in Cantonese, allowing for them to escape the awkwardness of having to perform in a language they don't understand. Of course, this means that people speak Cantonese to English speakers, and vice versa, without any indication that they are speaking different languages. Sort of like how Han Solo can understand Wookie, and Chewbacca can understand English, but you never hear Han speaking Wookiee or Chewbacca speaking English.

But Anita and Jordan are only the supporting players here. It became increasingly popular through the late 1990s to "internationalize" Hong Kong action films, most likely because the market for action films was so awful in Hong Kong, but interest in the films was still on the rise in the United States as guys like John Woo and Yuen Wo-ping (no relation to either Cory Yuen or Anita Yuen, who also are not related to one another. Cory Yuen's real last name isn't even Yuen) crossed over into quasi-mainstream recognition (meaning that anyone who paid close attention to movies knew about them, as opposed to just anyone who paid close attention to Hong Kong movies). Unfortunately for Hong Kong, their attempts to internationalize their action films involved two steps: 1) hire a guy who speaks some English to write a bunch of English dialog for the movie, and 2) hire some no-name Caucasian actors to deliver the dialog, or make your Hong Kong cast do phonetic memorization. The end results are, at their best, laughable. The bad writing and amateurish delivery actually did more to keep films from achieving cross-over success. The Caucasian actors were really bad, and many times what passes for understandable sounding English dialog from and to non-English speakers is nearly unintelligible to native English speakers.

Ringo Lam's *Undeclared War* was one of the very early efforts using this model, but that was too early. The first real international efforts came in the form of films all having to do with Jackie Chan: *Rumble in the Bronx*, *Who Am I* (both starring Chan), *First Strike*, *Mr. Nice Guy*, and the Chan produced *Gen-Y Cops*. *Rumble* achieved a decent degree of success, thanks to a domestic theatrical release and some good stunt work, but the film was never taken seriously (and doesn't really deserve to be) thanks to the horrible acting from the Caucasian cast, the completely

ludicrous portrayal of Bronx street gangs (they are multi-racial, ride around in dune buggies covered with Christmas lights, and live in giant warehouses filled with pinball machines and refrigerators), and the fact that they try to pass Vancouver off as New York City, even though you can see the Rocky Mountains in the background. It was good enough for other markets, but the film's targeted American audience just didn't buy it.

Similarly, *First Strike* and subsequent stabs by Chan at Hong Kong produced international hits, like *Mr. Nice Guy* and *Who Am I*, failed to garner much of an audience (though I personally like them a lot) because the English dialog and English acting is so bad. When a non-native speaker like Jackie Chan is still your best English-language actor in a film, your chances of being anything but smirked at by English-speaking audiences is pretty small. Chan wouldn't really achieve American super-stardom until he stopped trying to make cross-over films and just made American films like *Rush Hour* and *Shanghai Noon*.

The results of Hong Kong attempts to internationalize through sticking more English in their films were, as stated, as bad as you would expect. In the case of the writers, none of them were native English speakers, and their command of the nuances of language one needs to write a script in that language was simply not up to the task. Thus you get a lot of really weird, awkward dialog that uses English words and approximates English without actually being English. People say really stupid things in ways no actual English speaker would say them. Making matters worse was the fact that the Caucasian actors the film hired were, by and large, dreadful. From time to time, they would score an actual B-movie actor (Mark Dacascos, Coolio), but their delivery of the awkward dialog is just as bad. I often wondered why these native English speakers, even if they were bad actors, didn't correct the dialog as they went, but I've since learned that many of them tried, only to draw the ire of writers and directors insisting that they quit deviating from the way things had been written.

Similarly, Hong Kong started turning to the increasing number of foreign-born Chinese actors looking to make it in the Hong Kong film industry (Daniel Wu, Maggie Q, et cetera). Some of them were awful actors, and some of them were good, and some of them started out bad and got better (like Wu). Most had the benefit of being able to deliver dialog in either Cantonese or English with ease, but that still didn't help the scripts any, and the result was that even the good films weren't taken seriously as they undercut themselves with such weird, artificial dialog.

But there were still a lot of them being made in this fashion, and if you can roll with the short-comings of the scripts, a lot of the films are pretty good, or if not good, at least enjoyable, and that's always been far more important to me. Enter the Eagles, for example, suffers all these woes, but the movie itself remains stupidly enjoyable. In this case, the Caucasian actors include a bunch of stuntmen who are really awful actors, Shannon Lee (daughter of Bruce), Benny Urquidez, and Michael Wong.

Now Shannon Lee is the film's main attraction, but in discussing the cast I'm going to start with Michael Wong. I love Michael Wong. I think I may have said it somewhere else before, but if any actor in the world was going to be the spokesman for and embodiment of Teleport City, it's Michael Wong. This guy has been making movies — lots of movies — for decades now. And he is still an awful actor, as bad as he was the first time he ever appeared on screen. He works hard at his craft; he just doesn't get any better. Which is sort of how Teleport City is. We work hard, we really do put some effort into this thing, but after nearly a decade of doing it, I'm not really any better at it than I was when I first started, and despite how many people may read this site, we remain relatively respect-free. We rarely get screeners or comp review copies (in fact, in almost ten years, we've gotten four, two of which were awful "day in the life of a serial killer" shot on video stinkers); we don't get invited to attend or speak at premieres, festivals, or conventions; we don't get book deals; we don't get quoted on DVD covers or asked to write liner notes. We remain and probably always will be the Michael Wong of movie websites. But then, Michael Wong got to have a naked Ellen Chan grinding up and down on him, and we've yet to achieve that, so we're actually one below Michael Wong.

Suffice it to say that I think hanging out with Michael Wong would be cool. He probably has a ton of great stories, and even though I have repeatedly said he's not a very good actor, I still like him and I like a lot of the movies he's done. If I could hang out with any veteran of the Hong Kong movie scene, it would be Michael Wong. You might assume it would be Maggie Cheung, but as much as I might crush on her, it'd be way too nerve-wracking. With Michael, I could just sit back, drink some beers, smoke a cigar, and let him tell stories about all the crazy shit he's seen and endured over his years making movies. And while Wong isn't who you think of when you think of Hong Kong veterans, he still is a Hong Kong veteran and an early pioneer at speaking English when everyone expects the cast to be speaking Chinese.

Accompanying Wong and lending even more old-school cred to the movie is Benny "The Jet" Urquidez, a welcome face from the glory days of Hong Kong action cinema. Urquidez, who was famous for being an incredible fighter and being one of the creepiest looking gwailo in Hong Kong films (often described as a horrifying amalgamation of Ozzy

Osbourne and Christian Slater), was recruited to match up with Jackie Chan in two of the best action films of the 80s — *Dragons Forever* and *Wheels on Meals* (another early attempt from Jackie Chan to internationalize his films), both also starring Yuen Biao and Sammo Hung. The fights in these two movies between Chan and Urquidez are often named by fight film aficionados as two of the best scenes ever filmed.

Like many of the Western fighters who made names for themselves in Hong Kong — Richard Norton and Cynthia Rothrock being the two most notable — Urquidez was never able to extend his career to much success in the West, where the directors just didn't know how to direct him the way Sammo Hung or Cory Yuen did. He found pretty steady work as a choreographer, though. It's been years since I last saw Urquidez in front of the camera, and having him pop up in *Enter the Eagles* as the main heavy is a welcome return for an old, scary face.

And finally there's Shannon Lee. Her film career, spotty and minimal though it may be, became the source of a fair amount of controversy among people prone to generating controversy over Shannon Lee, with many claiming that she only got parts because she was Bruce Lee's daughter. I'm sure being the daughter of the Dragon and the sister of Brandon helped open doors, as did the fact that she's pretty cute, but once she was through the door, it was up to her to live or die by her own merits. Criticism that she didn't have any real fighting skill is patently ridiculous. Neither did many of the people who became kungfu stars. Michelle Yeoh was a dancer, for instance, and Joyce Godenzi was a beauty queen. What matters — all that matters — is what Shannon Lee did once she got the part, and what she did was try really damn hard. Although the era of "no stunt doubles" was a thing of the past by the 1990s, Lee still did most of her own fighting and stuntwork, being doubled only for the especially acrobatic and flip-heavy shots. She worked out extensively with Urquidez, and busted her ass to learn the moves she'd need to appear as a credible force on-screen.

And she does well. She looks natural and comfortable in the action scenes and moves fast and gracefully while never lacking the illusion of power behind her punches and kicks. She is helped along both by her training with Urquidez and by Cory Yuen's panache for shooting and editing non-fighters to look like believable on-screen badasses (and somehow make fights comprised mostly of posing still seem fast-paced and action-packed). Her acting is stilted, thanks in equal parts to inexperience and bad dialog, but she has a natural on-screen charisma that is far more reminiscent of her dad than any of the half-witted calls for her to actually mimic her dad (which include making "Bruce Lee face" while ripping a guy's hair out and blowing it in his face). I was able to buy her immediately as a smirking, kungfu powered assassin.

The rest of the Caucasian cast is comprised of guys whose names you won't know unless you know a lot of stuntmen and fight choreographers. This is because most of them are stuntmen and fight choreographers, and while that means they know how to handle themselves in the action scenes, the film is perhaps ill advised to have given them so much dialog.

Somewhere amid all this is a plot, though to be honest, the less attention you pay to that plot, the more you will enjoy this movie.

What we have here is a heist film in which two groups of thieves — Michael Wong's highly trained group, and the rag-tag duo of Jordan Chan and Anita Yuen — are after the same diamond. Wong wants to sell it to Urquidez, who in turn will fence it to a really white looking sheik in a fake mustache and goatee. Chan and Yuen want to steal it to show up Wong, who snubbed them when they somehow magically figured out what Wong was planning and how they could find him. Obviously, things go horribly awry, allowing for the film to dispense with plot and go hog wild with outrageous action scenes.

To say the film isn't entirely believable is a gross understatement. Nothing presented in this movie is the least bit plausible, from the ridiculous schemes to steal the diamond to the extended shoot-out and rescue set in a police station (where, among other things, Michael Wong stymies an entire platoon of well-armed riot cops by throwing a potted plant at them), to the finale in an out-of-control luxury blimp (!), but then, Cory Yuen and Hong Kong action films have never been the place to go for solid scripting and plausible events. The heist in particular seems ridiculously easy, and I wish that action films all over the world featuring a heist would stop relying on the hoary old cliché of having the security be a bunch of goof-offs who fall asleep or get distracted by soccer games on television, or just don't make the most basic and obvious of logical connections. For instance, if you are guarding the world's most expensive diamond, and the alarm starts going haywire at the exact same moment there's a mysterious car wreck outside, with a couple of doctors appearing out of nowhere, the most obvious course of action is probably not to disable all the alarms around the diamond then have everyone run outside to stand around.

One would also think that, if a thief is caught in the diamond enclosure during the heist, then his claim that "those other people took the diamond" wouldn't be accepted at face value, and that you might, at the very least, search



him. But then, you'd also think there's not many places you can hide a giant diamond when you're wearing a skintight cat burglar outfit. Or that the police, upon arresting you, might make you put on different clothes and thus find the diamond even if they didn't bother to search you for it. But none of that happens here, allowing the film to segue into a completely outrageous and even less believable rescue from the police department, which begins with no one noticing an unauthorized helicopter landing on the roof of the police station and disgorging a lot of heavily armed people in tough looking black combat gear.

Unfettered by the mooring lines of logic, Yuen allows *Enter the Eagles* to soar like the out-of-control luxury blimp that will serve as the location for the finale. Shannon Lee gets to beat the crap out of a lot of people and pose with guns (sometimes, unfortunately, held sideways, because that's what people did in the 90s), and there are tons of shoot-outs, including the aforementioned police station setpiece, which ends up being a near thirty-minute long over-the-top action blow-out that includes tons of shooting, kungfu, car chases, people being dragged around on metal ladders dangling from helicopters, and lots of stuff blowing up before our heroes finally make their escape on, of all things, a slow-moving public trolley, where no one seems concerned about the group of heavily armed and bleeding people who just clambered on then got off a stop later without the cops noticing they're carrying guns and wearing body armor. But whatever, the whole sequence is pretty great, and I've certainly enjoyed even less plausible scenarios.

The movie attempts to outdo itself during the finale in the blimp, in which Shannon Lee and Benny Urquidez get to shine and steal the show as they engage in a lengthy fight throughout the blimp as it explodes and falls apart around them. It's not Jackie Chan vs. Urquidez, but it's a damn good fight scene. Somewhere in the maelstrom, Michael Wong smokes cigars and punches people, and Anita Yuen hangs upside down and shoots machine guns. She's not the least bit believable as someone who could beat someone else up, but Yuen seems to recognize this, and so instead has the scrawny gal just blow the crap out of anything that moves. When she does engage in fisticuffs, it's with an opponent she obviously couldn't beat, and so after having her thrown around a little, the movie just sort of wanders off and pretends the whole thing isn't happening, returning to it every now and then to show her still going toe-to-toe with the guy despite the fact that there's no way it could have lasted that long.

The final result is a pretty fun action film, even if it's a "bad" film. The dialog is silly and poorly delivered by just about everyone, and people trade lines in Cantonese and English as if they were the same language. But Anita Yuen and Jordan Chan are both good actors (although Jordan is underused here), and Wong and Lee are bad actors with a lot of charisma that compensates for their short-comings. And Benny the Jet is Benny the Jet, looking creepy as ever but obviously having a lot of fun with one of the meatier villain roles he's ever gotten (previously, he never had more than a line or two of dialog). Cory Yuen's direction is crisp and keeps the movie moving along at a fast pace, which makes the obvious weakness of the script easier to ignore. Shot in and around Prague, the film manages to achieve that international feel location-wise, and Yuen never misses an opportunity to indulge in a little sight-seeing. Although the film is shot on the typical cheap Hong Kong budget, it achieves the look and feel of a much more expensive film.

The action is largely CGI-free, though the movie does throw in some pretty lame looking CGI explosions. The fights belong to Shannon and Benny, with Michael standing on the sidelines waiting to cold-cock someone if they need it. He's never been a kungfu star, so his action is largely relegated to shoot-outs and a couple straight-up fist fights, which he has always handled well. I think Shannon Lee proves she has the stuff it takes to be a legitimate action star. She can always improve her acting (unless Michael Wong is her teacher, I guess). With the right director and an on-set mentor like Urquidez, she easily rises to the level of many of the best fighting femmes. I'd love to see more of her in films like this.

So yeah — *Enter the Eagles*. There are no eagles in it, and the acting and writing are nothing to highlight in your acting or writing class, but the cast is fun, the action is plentiful, and everything moves along nicely. I had a lot of fun watching it, and in the end, that's really all that ever matters to me. (by Keith Allison of Teleport City)

**Erotic Passion (Hong Kong, 1993: Lau Chan)** - If "Rock on Fire" seems to deliberately explore the symbolic possibilities of Cat III themes, "Erotic Passion" may have a less intentional yet equally conspicuous symbolic quality. The seemingly endless gratuitous sexuality seems largely lacking in either eroticism or passion, alternating between the demeaning and the merely dull. Perhaps the most passionate and exciting presence is Nadeki herself. She appears in a supporting role as an enforcer for the villain of the piece.

The surface plot vaguely concerns a woman seeking revenge on behalf of her father. She is assisted by no less than Yeung Pan-pan playing a relative who eventually wades in to sort out the mess. Pan-pan and Nadeki have exactly complementary roles — each represents the "muscle" of the respective protagonists. The presence of these serious

martial arts performers in such a torrid setting is both surprising and weirdly sensual. The contrast between their deadpan determination, austere appearance and physical virtuosity with the other filmic vision of female gendered roles is so stark that it inevitably associates the two. There is no middle ground here (or in "Rock on Fire"). Women are either utter sex objects or frighteningly aggressive. Such juxtaposition of extremes virtually fetishizes their roles – and arguably aligns the sensuality of their martial artistry with pornography as another visual pleasure. Nadeki obliges by wearing black, from her combat boots and bomber jacket to beret. She ruthlessly demolishes the male hero who attempts to challenge her – finishing him with a knife-hand strike to the throat (yet another instance of choking).

Unlike most Cat. III potboilers, the martial arts sequences – exclusively those of Pan-pan and Nadeki – are quite excellent. This is clearly attributable to their physical talent. It is an ironic commentary on the course of 1990s action cinema that a high quality martial arts confrontation between two of the industry's most competent female martial arts action performers should be buried in such a production. Although brief, it's worth the wait. When matched with the skill and timing of Pan-pan, Nadeki was seemingly able to unload her full speed and kicking ability. Quality is unmistakable. Although this fight is marred by a brief wirework finale, it's of quite a high standard nevertheless. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Escape from Brothel (Hong Kong, 1992: Johnny Wang Lung-Wei)** - To be honest *Escape from Brothel* is a bit of a schizophrenic hoot that I enjoyed quite a bit. It jumps around from sex exploitation film to slapstick comedy to melodrama to sadistic violence to brutal action like a freewheeling pinball with no rhythm or reason. One minute a transvestite peeper in the women's locker room, the next hung up like a piece of meat and being strangled. You try not to think about it too much and just go along with the ride. Director Johnny Wang is best known as an action actor, showing up in loads of Shaw Brother films, almost always as the heavy, but I notice in looking at his small filmography as a director that he was behind two other low budget action films that I quite enjoyed – *Widow Warriors* and *The Innocent Interloper*. So even though *Escape from Brothel* is known primarily as a Cat III bump and grind show, the action is very solid and very rough. As is the sex now that I think about it.

Pauline Chan doesn't even get through the opening credits before she has to show her money makers to the audience and the same goes for her co-actress Murakami Rena who stares at her nude reflection in a mirror in the same way I look through a window at an Indian buffet – with pure delight. Hung (Pauline) and Ann (Rena) are practitioners of the noble art of making a man happy – in other words prostitutes. They work for Mama Suzi (veteran actress Pak Yan) who introduces them to Mr. Chou (Stuart Ong) one night as an airline hostess and a secretary who need a little spare cash. He happily obliges and takes them both for the Charlie Sheen like price of HKD 50,000. He brings along a sex book so that he doesn't forget what to do – sort of like Sarah Palin having to write "Energy" on her hand so she won't forget what she is supposed to say – a cheat sheet of sorts. Among his bag of tricks is the "Pushing 2 Carts" position followed by "Graceful Ladies Sitting Like Buddha" and finally "Hero Raising Arms to Drum" Exhausting work for all. Later when he realizes that the two girls are just ordinary low paid working girls, he reaps his revenge by having the two girls work each other over with a baseball bat – internally if you get my drift.

Hung has a boyfriend Sam (Alex Fong) back in the Mainland who has no idea what she is doing – but this changes when he is tricked by some friends to sneak into Hong Kong and participate in a phony robbery/insurance scam. Everything goes wrong though with a foreigner being killed and Sam on the run – not just from the cops but also from Billy Ho (Billy Chow) who set the whole thing up and now wants to clean up the entire mess. We were earlier introduced to Billy in one of Hong Kong's more infamous action scenes. He is in bed with Sophia Crawford (one of the gwielo action actresses who came to HK in the 80's and 90's for work) when her "husband" and a friend come in and demand payment. Not from Billy Chow – one of the really terrific underrated action figures of this period – he demolishes the two men and then has to deal with a nude leg kicking Sophia. I wish I had been a fly on the wall for that scene. Sam shows up at Hung's apartment and hides in the closet only to realize very quickly what his girlfriend does for a living – in the most graphic of ways – but Billy tracks him down leading to a simply splendid furious final fifteen minutes of pounding, gutting, burning, falling and more pounding. Good to the last drop. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Eternal Combat, An (Hong Kong, 1991: Yip Shing-Hong)** - This story begins in the historical past. Hard to be more exact when.....

A holyman/Sifu and his assistant Sai Gwai (actor unknown, possibly Gabriel Wong) team up with a local official Dai Yat, and are soon attacked by a Japanese warrior, who is assisted by a princess (Joey Wong). The battle somehow transports them to the present day, where they wander around and try to adjust. Clearly a nutcase, Sifu is

committed to an asylum, where his counsellor Gigi is a reincarnation of the princess. Meanwhile, the evil Japanese warrior has secreted himself in the cross of a Catholic Church, where Dai Yat and Sai Gwai are staying. All of this builds up to a good vs evil battle which, somehow along the way, manages to bring in Anthony Wong as a psycho who stalks Gigi.

If this all sounds dull and rather muddled, it certainly isn't. The photography, especially during the flying people fight scenes, is lush and colourful, equal to the standard set by *Chinese Ghost Story*. The story strikes just the right balance between clarity, confusion, suspense and comedy. If you like wu'xia (flying people) flicks, this one is a must-see. Warmly recommended. (by STSH of HKMDB)

**Evil Cat (Hong Kong, 1987: Dennis Yu)** - One of those typical zany mixes of horror, action and comedy that Hong Kong produced back in the 80s. This one has the late (and legendary) Lau Kar-Leung playing the last male member of a line of Mao Shan priests who's in the final stages of cancer and who must fight an evil cat demon who is resurrected once every 50 years. He takes on a pupil (Mark Cheng), the chauffeur of a rich guy possessed by the demon.

The photography early on is fairly pedestrian, but later it gets a little bit more akin to Dario Argento's best work, with blue filters and lighting to indicate the monster's presence. There are some wire-assisted stunts, but those looking for kung fu courtesy of Lau Kar-Leung will have to content themselves with a brief fight between him and some security guards. Even then, he takes more lumps than you might expect him to. And the ending...it's full 70s bummer. (by Blake Matthews)

**Exorcist Master (Taiwan, 1993: Wu Ma)** - Oh no... it's a ghost! Oh no... it's a hopping vampire! Oh no, it's two well-meaning but bumbling students of the Taoist master! Oh no, it's a catholic priest! Hmmm, wait a minute, that isn't scary. But no - he's played by Wu Ma! Eek! Not to fear though, here comes Lam Ching Ying in full eyebrow mode - he won't let anything really bad happen, will he?

Except that this time our favourite *Mr. Vampire* has a new challenge to face when the Catholic church brings more than some hymns to his Chinese village - now we have a western vampire in town, something that his Taoist trainings never prepared him for. And when the western vampire gets crossed with a bunch of Chinese gyonsi the situation gets even worse. Soon you don't know who's going to be hopping about with pointy fingernails one minute, and who's going to fly up and suck your blood the next. What's a vampire buster to do?

The formula Lam Ching Ying + Vampires is quite simply foolproof... it is just not possible for a bad movie to ensue. Whilst Exorcist Master is in no way the equal of the original, it does manage to add enough new ideas into the mix to keep it interesting. True, there's a section in the middle which is weighed down by inane eastern/western culture clash & innuendo/toilet humour. But cut to the chase and you've got completely unscary vampires, crazy Taoist rituals and a whole load of top drawer stunt work / action scenes. Ngai Sing has a rare role as a good guy here... more naive than menacing, but still demonstrating some great athletic talent and passable kung fu knowledge. One of the gwei lo faces you'll have seen before does a splendid job as the western vampire too - thankfully a non-speaking role :D

I really have no idea why the other reviewers here have dissed it so much... lighten up guys! (by MrBooth of HKMDB)

**Extreme Crisis (Hong Kong, 1998: Bruce Law)** - A Japanese cult, Shojenomichi, lead by Yoshinaga, now in prison, is attempting to bring its leader back into the group by taking hostages and threatening to unleash a bomb on Hong Kong containing a deadly poison that could easily kill 6 million people. The leader of the clan temporarily is named Lone. Ken Cheung (Chi Lam) and Captain Takami (Sawada) have to intercept the cult to stop it from spreading the sarin toxin onto Hong Kong.

I had heard that this movie had action every 5 minutes. It didn't seem very true in the beginning, but now that I think about it, there was a LOT going on in *Extreme Crisis*. And although a lot of it was gunplay, it was well done. Chi Lam did his own stunts, amazingly well too. I heard he broke his leg while falling down an elevator shaft when the wire snapped. I was surprised to hear that he even attempted this stunt without a double. I knew that he did some of his own, but didn't think he did them ALL. Anyways, great job on his part. He looks very professional. Sawada did a good job too, though he didn't have half as many stunts as Chi Lam.

But the two of them make a great duet here. One is Japanese, who speaks English, sometimes Japanese, and the other is Chinese, who speaks either Cantonese or English. I like the mixing of languages, even if it makes it hard to read the subtitles (because I was watching their mouths to be sure they were actually speaking the language). That's what's nice here, no dubbing. Everything sounds real, and looks real. Very nice. It's not like *Blacksheep Affair* where, in Russia (Lavernia or whatever), they speak English with an English accent, dubbed English mind you. What I was expecting from *Extreme Crisis* was another *Blacksheep Affair* because of the similar plot, the Japanese cast, and overall look.

Even though there really isn't any martial arts besides some brawls at the end, it all works. Sure, Sawada seems to be capable of doing a fight scene, and Chi Lam looked that way too, but since they didn't get in one, they had to do other stuff like more gunplay or stunts, which was ok in this case. The film quality was extremely high, and the cinematography was so well done that I had a nightmare about it that night (explained below). Oh, the DVD. That's what I bought this on. Sure, extra stuff is included, but the quality of the DVD is really bad. I don't know if it's the codec that they're using or what, but when I see the chunky, flashing black stuff on jackets and anything else that has a trace of light on it, I wonder if DVDs are really any better than VCDs. A VCD refreshes the blocks (what I call them) almost every frame, while the DVDs have smaller blocks, BUT THEY DON'T CHANGE UNTIL MAYBE THE 20TH FRAME!! This angers me because, frankly, I want more from a \$25 DVD than an \$8 VCD. Nonetheless, that's only in dark parts. The light scenes look awesome, and so do the dark ones anyways despite the stupid MPEG-2 format (couldn't they do better with 4.5 gigs on their hands?).

I want to elaborate here. Chi Lam's scene outside while boarding a moving big rig, from a moving sports car (his stunt too) is well done. He gets inside the truck and finds out it can't be stopped, so his girlfriend (Shu Qi, from *Gorgeous*) stops the sports car in front of the truck, which pushes the sports car more, so he manages to get out after the truck slows down, grab her, duck, and the whole deal explodes right behind them. If they used computer effects, I couldn't tell. There were lots of explosions, all of which were filmed CORRECTLY and VERY WELL. There was one part where 3 or 4 cars explode outside the Mandarin Hotel and the camera work done on them made my jaw drop. A simple explosion, filmed correctly, can look very nice.

Take note here. This movie isn't for the faint hearted. Lots of people die, even ones you'd expect to live. Hostages are killed routinely, and you see it. Gruesome, but it has some truth behind it I guess. These terrorists were correct in their own eyes, so they had no remorse and no reason to hold back, and they didn't. Reminds me of the Crusaders... or Columbus... ahem, nevermind. But I started getting a little edgy from all of it, which is good I think because the camera work and storyline really hit me hard, and because of it, as I mentioned above, I had a nightmare about it the same night when I watched it, one with the same plot and similar characters, and lots of good guys getting blown away. At one point in my dream, I was standing next to someone who was an integral part of the plot, and someone comes up behind him and puts a hole in his head with a magnum. Not pretty. But like I say, this movie hits hard, harder than any American shootemup like *Die Hard 1, 2, or 3*, or any Arnold movie because they don't have the right music, settings, camera work, or characters. This one has all that.

Perhaps it hits so hard with the way they moved while shooting and being shot at. They don't just strafe and shoot, with the enemy missing the entire time like in *Commando* with Arnie, but have to get down and fear for their lives. Hell, they might get hit! Does Arnie think of that? No, he's got his chopper-gatling gun to do the scaredy cat business and he's got work to do, so the viewer thinks, "Ok, Arnie can't get hit. I'm not worried." Here, Chi Lam, Sawada, anyone can get hit, easily. The enemies have machine guns, pistols, and even a flame thrower, which takes out an entire group equivalent in equipment to a SWAT team, which is an extreme scene (makes me think of why they picked the name *Extreme Crisis*). So, here, the viewer ducks with Chi Lam and Sawada, looks around the corner carefully, and doesn't make quick decisions, which Sawada points out when Chi Lam quickly lifts a dead body with a bomb attached, which would go off if the body is lifted. Luckily Sawada isn't a "careless cop" and prevents the bomb from going off.

Chi Lam takes on a beefcake in a bathroom which is pretty brutal. He does his own stunts, again, one of which is being thrown against a mirror behind a sink and also throwing himself through a stall door. He mostly gets thrown around like a toy, but has the last laugh with a toilet tank cover. I rubbed my head after seeing that.

Because I expected more from the stunt department and there was only that one fight with Chi Lam, as well as Sawada constantly breaking one guy's arm who was holding a knife, I don't want to give this a 10. So, because it's such an enjoyable movie, it's worth a buy. (by Eric Jacobus of the Stunt People)

**Fatal Chase (Hong Kong, 1992: Philip Ko Fei)** - After Waise Lee, in a cameo role, arrests the Philippino gang leader Torres in HK, he is extradited to the Philippines, escorted by Inspector Dragon (Robin Shou) and Yukari. On arrival

Torres escapes with the aid of corrupt police officers. Yukari doesn't have much to do until she and Robin Shou confront Torres and his gang. She has a brief but excellent fight wielding a baseball bat, with nice combination kicks. But she is stabbed to death by Torres only halfway into the movie. Dragon then teams up with a Philippino police officer played by Philip Ko. Together they take on a series of gang members, until eventually killing Torres in a final confrontation. Yukari only has an expanded cameo role, with most of the action involving Robin Shou and Philip Ko. The editing is choppy, complicating an already confusing story. Unfortunately some of the action scenes alternate rapidly with comic elements that seem out of place. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Fatal Termination (Hong Kong, 1990: Andrew Kam Yeung-Wa)** - A Hong Kong police officer's wife seeks revenge when a ruthless munitions smuggler kidnaps her daughter. This movie features the most retarded stunt ever put on film, no doubt about that.

Jackie Chan may be the most impressive and dedicated stunt performer of all-time, but at least in his case and usually in other Hong Kong movies, all the stunts were performed by consenting adults who knew what they were getting into (for the most part).

What about the fights?

Few, short, and far in-between.

1. The first fight (more like a skirmish) happens between Robin Shou and a bunch of drug dealers. Short, not much to say here.

2. There is another fight later in the movie between Robin Shou again and some bad guys. Again, quite short.

3. The first real fight in the movie is between Moon Lee and the main bad guy (Phillip Ko Fei). It's kinda cool, raw, and brutal. Moon Lee gets kicked around quite a bit, but delivers some pain in return.

4. Then we come to the last fight in the movie, which is again between Moon Lee and Phillip Ko Fei, but this time, her husband joins her. Again, pretty good, but nothing to write home about.

Sadly, the movie ends in a shoot-out so no more fights (what a shame... I wanted a Moon Lee vs Robin Shou fight!!!)

So before we get to the stunt, this is the worst directed Hong Kong movie I've seen yet, and with a stacked cast to boot. It should have been good, but it really wasn't all that much. It tries to be exciting but most of the action was filmed in a botched way and it shows. Almost the whole 3 stars I gave this movie go toward that epic stunt and the crazy shit that ensues. Speaking of which...

Summary

Stunts - 100/100 | Behold, a stunt the likes of which you will never see filmed for real again, ever. Utterly ridiculous.

Narrative - 26/100

Fight Choreography - 82/100 | Not enough fights, but the few fights that are in the movie are pretty damn good (I mean, this is Moon Lee we're talking about here). She always high kicks her way through everything.

Enjoyment - 50/100 | It's mostly the first half that sucks. There are other insane moments in this movie worth watching. My recommendation: start the movie just before the insane car chase (around 40 minutes), and go from there. You're not missing much. (by Daxtreme of KFF)

**Fatal Vacation (Hong Kong, 1990: Eric Tsang)** - Welcome to the Philippines – the land of sweet smiles, sunny days and getting your head blown off. My guess is that the Philippine Tourist Board did not put their stamp of approval on this film – not unless they wanted to keep tourists far away. The film does not treat the Philippines kindly with

remarks such as "You must have eaten too much Philippino food to be so stupid" or having soldiers willing to sell the tourists everything they own including the clothes they are wearing. This film falls into the interesting sub-genre that can be described as "Go to South East Asia and prepare to be raped, killed or possessed and maybe all three".

Many of the films in this category deal with the supernatural – black magic and witches – but this one takes a different tact. This was made in 1990 a year after Tiananmen Square and seven years before Hong Kong was to be handed over to China. The Handover is on the minds of many of the characters as they talk about emigrating out of Hong Kong before it is too late. Here director Eric Tsang and writer Nam Yin paint a fearful picture of this future world.

They do so with a film that leaves little to the imagination – subtlety is nowhere to be found here – this has exploitation written all over it in big red colors, but as broad and absurd as it becomes I did find it quite involving and harrowing at times. The film is littered with dead bodies and their deaths are up close and personal. There are also a couple of rape scenes that had me flinching.

A tour organized from Hong Kong comes to the Philippines. The group consists of your usual motley crew of different types. The organizer is Irene Wan and the guide is Eric Tsang. Among the tourists are two grandparents (Victor Wong and Dang Bik-wan) who are bringing their grandchild, two cops (Nam Yin is the older one I believe), three triads (headed by Tommy Wong) two young female adults (the nice one being Cecilia Yui Ching Ching), a fellow with two mistresses (Joan Tong is one) and a set of twins. Many of them will be dead by the end of the film – it sort of becomes a guessing game as to who will be the next to die.

In Quezon the bus is hijacked by a group of rabid Communist terrorists who demand that the government release one of their members for the tourists – and to show they mean business they begin the process of killing the tourists – two by two. In one gripping scene the Communist leader forces Tsang to take a gun with one bullet in it and aim it at his group one by one and pull the trigger until he has to point it at Irene who he has fallen in love with. Tsang is terrific in this film and in this particular scene he wrenches every emotion possible out of it.

Eventually, in true Hong Kong fashion they bond together, break out, steal some weapons and do loads of killing themselves. Fortunately, they must have seen enough Chow Yun Fat films to know how to handle the automatic weapons! After watching this I finally realized what was wrong with the US strategy in the Vietnamese war. Instead of sending well-trained armed forces, we should have sent busloads of Hong Kong tourists! (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Fight Back to School (Hong Kong, 1991: Gordon Chan)** - After the runaway success of *All for the Winner*, expectations were set high for Stephen Chow, and he met them with *Fight Back to School*. It was another huge hit for Chow -- actually breaking the previous box-office record he had set with *All for the Winner* -- and fully solidified his "moy len tau" (nonsense comedy) style as a viable genre in the cut-throat business of Hong Kong movies. Like most of Chow's movies, *Fight Back to School* holds up pretty well, even though over a dozen years have passed since its' initial release.

In the film, Chow plays a hot-headed SDU officer who is saved from being kicked off the force by a captain. The captain (who is about to retire and doesn't want to lose any face) had his gun stolen by some visiting students, so he sends Stephen undercover into a school to try and recover the piece. Once inside, he soon runs afoul of both the school's principal and a local gang leader (Roy Cheung). However, with the support of his partner (Ng Man-Tat) and a sympathetic teacher (Cheung Man), Chow soon becomes one of the most popular "kids" at the school. He seems to be close to finishing his case, but soon turns up something that tests his mettle.

*Fight Back to School* isn't as densely-packed as some of Chow's later films. I'll admit that the plot sounds like a bad episode of "21 Jump Street", but director Gordon Chan keeps things moving at a tight clip. But then again, Chow didn't have to try and outdo himself at this point in his career. Quite simply, *Fight Back to School* is a fast-paced and, more importantly, funny movie. Even though, for the most part, this is a surprisingly "clean" film, especially considering Wong Jing was involved with it (that probably explains the sequence where Chow chews on a condom like it's bubble gum). At any rate, there are a good amount of laugh-out-loud sequences; the fact that there are several solid action sequences as well (with Chow, as always, doing a great Bruce Lee imitation) is just icing on the cake.

*Fight Back to School* isn't Chow's best work. It does have a low-budget vibe to it and there a few clumsy attempts at serious dramatics, but any Stephen Chow movie is better than eighty percent of the so-called "comedies" that ooze out from both sides of the ocean. Even though there haven't been too many extraordinary or mind-blowing

moments in his work, Stephen Chow is probably the most consistent actor Hong Kong has ever produced. For the most part, you always know what you're going to get and Chow delivers it, with entertaining results. Bottom line is, if you've gotten hyped on Stephen Chow after seeing him in his later movies like *Shaolin Soccer* and want to check out some of his beginnings, a film like this is an excellent way to start -- and if you're already a fan, you're sure to have a good time. (by MrBlue of HKMDB)

**Fight Back to School 2 (Hong Kong, 1992: Gordon Chan)** - Follow up to fresh and funny *Fight Back to School* is less fresh and less funny. Stephen Chow returns as ace undercover Chow Sing-Sing, who gets demoted to traffic cop when he cheeses off one of his superiors. Even though he's been barred from the case, he decides to go undercover at a local international high school to stop evil terrorists bent on terrorizing people. Problem is: the cops don't want him there but he does it anyway. Also, he briefly romances Athena Chu (which does nothing for his engagement to Cheung Man) and beats up boss Ng Man-Tat in every other scene.

Like any Stephen Chow movie, the quality of the film pretty much rests on his performance. In that, he carries the picture extremely well. His deadpan delivery and winning comic acting have saved many a movie, and this one is no exception. Besides Chow and his antics, the film really doesn't have much else going for it. There are the occasional creative moments, like Chow's cha-cha with Athena Chu during a judo match, but too often the film relies on unnecessary movie parodies (Ng Man-Tat does a *Terminator 2* riff for no apparent reason) and semi-serious action. The strict action ending is director Gordon Chan's specialty, but it reduces the film from being a "Stephen Chow movie" to being a "movie with Stephen Chow in it". His ample charisma and comedic talents do not drive the picture, and as a result we get something that's a little less than we might like. (by Kozo of LoveHKfilm)

**Final Option (Hong Kong, 1994: Gordon Chan)** - Director Gordon Chan has become the premier HK director when it comes to intense and highly realistic (in terms of tactics and weapons-handling) shootouts. He can literally stage and shoot them better than the top Hollywood masters - Simply watch the garage shootout in "2000 A.D." to see what I mean. And what was the film that put him on this road? "The Final Option", of course! Following a young officer's indoctrination into the SDU (Hong Kong's SWAT/counter-terrorism team) and his eventual missions on the team, *Final Option* is rock solid action thriller. Being Chan's first 'realistic action' film, the technique isn't quite as polished as one might expect of him. However, it does have one of the better stories he's ever worked with. It has real heart (without falling into melodrama) and you feel for the characters. When the action does come (the last 30 minutes are essentially one large action scene), it is interesting and well-staged, but lacks that "snap" and thrill to it that elevates the best action sequences. The bigger budget sequel to this film is called "First Option" and it basically is the reverse of this one: Lots of amazing action, very thin story. (by Ipkevin of HKMDB)

**Final Run (Hong Kong, 1989: Philip Ko Fei) - aka Kickfighter** - "Bull" (Dick Wei) is suspected by a paramilitary group of narcotics smuggling in Thailand. The actual culprit is his sister's (Yukari's) fiancé Wan Kwok Chuen. Three corrupt HK cops, Sgt. Kau (Philip Ko), Mr. Shen, and Ma Chun Fun attempt to blackmail Ma's Customs Inspector friend Chiang Chi Nan to join them. When he refuses, Kau arranges to kill his family and frames him for the murder of Shen - who has double-crossed them. Chiang flees to his aunt in Thailand. Kau and Ma follow, and make contact with Yan Ya Yiang (Simon Yam) to arrange a drug deal and finally eliminate Chiang as well as eliminate Wan - Shen's former partner. These acts provoke Yukari and Bull to attack Yan's gang. Bull is killed. When Kau goes after Chiang, he and his cousin retaliate, killing Yan.

The threads of the this complex plot eventually combine in an assault by Yukari's paramilitary force on General Wu's compound in the Golden Triangle. Despite the complexity, the plot is coherent and involving. This is definitely one of Philip Ko's better directorial efforts, and deserved the financial success it enjoyed when released in HK. The movie is well paced, with a good soundtrack and no comedy. There is also an element of character development, exposing the ultimate futility of greed and betrayal, as well the resulting vulnerability. Yukari mainly appears in the final third of the film, and steals the ending with her athletic style and entertaining form. The movie's action is quite brutal, with uniformly good martial arts performances. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**First Option (Hong Kong, 1996: Gordon Chan)** - People who think that Michael Fitzgerald Wong is the worst actor in Hong Kong films need to check out this heavy-on-the-testosterone action offering. This is not to say that I believe that he deserved the HKFA Best Actor nomination he garnered for his star turn as a muscular Special Duty Unit

(SDU) commander named Don Wong. Rather, what I am seeking to point out here is that there actually are far worse acting performances on display -- and individuals with way less screen presence -- in that which is a loose sequel to another SDU focused movie starring Michael Wong entitled "Final Option".

Little evidence exists either in FIRST OPTION that the 1996 offering's scriptwriters (Chan Hing-Kai and director Gordon Chan) produced work that's of the highest caliber. This is particularly so when one beholds the English language dialogue they "crafted" for more than just its Asian-American lead -- who really ought to be more fluent in Cantonese after having lived and worked in Hong Kong for as many years as he has -- to utter. Perhaps nowhere in the film is it more apparent than when a couple of Yoda's lines are borrowed from "The Empire Strikes Back" for the movie's main man to apparently seriously quote. The lack of depth of many of this effort's characters gives further testimony of the script's weakness. Ditto re what plot there is -- which centers on the collaborative effort(s) by different special police sections and a group of Customs Department agents to carry out a major drug bust and prevent a huge U.S.A. bound shipment of Golden Triangle narcotics from leaving Hong Kong -- containing quite a few glaring holes.

Despite all this, the truth of the matter is that I found FIRST OPTION to constitute quite enthralling as well as entertaining viewing; so much so that I was quite happy for the most part to overlook quite a few of the film's weaknesses. Actually, the fact of the bulk of the enjoyable movie's characters being no more than ciphers contributed enormously to making the lengthy climactic battle and other skirmishes in which many of them were involved suspenseful and thrilling since the combatants' chances of survival were less predictable than they would have been if their personalities had been more clearly -- and conventionally -- fashioned. Alternatively put: The tension was considerably heightened by there being a very strong possibility that quite a few of the assembled team of law enforcers -- as opposed to just the criminals -- in this effort were really only around to ensure that there would be an impressively high body count accrued in each of the often bombastic work's well-staged military-type action operations (Although Don Wong states at one point about his squad that "We are part of the police force. We are not soldiers", their style and tactics seem closer to those of US Navy SEALs and comparable elite troops than any other group of constabulary depicted in most other Hong Kong productions).

Another aspect of FIRST OPTION appreciated by this female (re)viewer was the unHollywood-like treatment of -- as well as part played by -- Gigi Leung's Inspector Minnie Kwan character. Although the gangly actress and the very raw looking Customs Department official she essayed initially looked terribly out of place in that which a HKMDB reviewer has suggested may be "the ultimate guy movie", the manner in which they manage to come up tops in the end was very satisfying to me. With regards to two other parts played by women in this generally gung ho effort, I (also) was gratified: That the gender of Lee Fung's senior police officer Katie Ngan was apparently considered as unremarkable as that of the high(er) ranking colleague of hers played by Damian Lau; and to see the lass disparagingly referred to as a "China doll" by the film's chief villain have a role in tracking him down and consequently ensuring his appropriate fate.

For those Hong Kong movie fans who could care less about such matters, FIRST OPTION probably will alternately appeal by way of the amount and type of firepower on display in a film that pits some dedicated lawmen and - women against a group of expertly-trained -- and heavily-armed -- American military personnel turned drug traffickers. Suffice to say re this element of the well shot -- pun not particularly intended... -- offering that action director Bruce Law sure used the generous amount of large explosives, squibs, ammunition and other tools of his trade at his disposal to put up a good and exciting show. (by YTSL of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**First Shot (Hong Kong, 1993: David Lam)** - "First Shot" was based on or derivative from a few earlier works which does not, in itself, make it inferior either to the earlier movies or to other films in which the borrowing is less obvious. The structure and plots of "Throne of Blood", "Hamlet" and "Don Giovanni" weren't original with Kurosawa, Shakespeare or Mozart--the genius lies much more in the execution of the idea than in the genesis of the idea itself. While David Lam's opus doesn't bear comparison to such masterpieces it is by no means a bad movie.

There were several specific references to the Mamet/DePalma "The Untouchables", one of which was rendered somewhere between incomprehensible and risible by the subtitles: "If he shoots you with a gun you kick him the ass..." but the bludgeoning of a disloyal underling by Al Capone was mirrored very effectively when Brother Chiu amputated a thug's thumb with a cigar cutter at a small celebratory dinner. A battle toward the end of the movie took place in a sawmill that was closed for the day, typical of many fights in many Hong Kong movies occurring in abandoned or closed factories. Waise Lee was properly repellent as Mr. Chiu, known as the Faucet or the Tap, the person around whom all official misconduct in the Crown Colony revolved. Baat Leung-Gam was his scary and effective killer, equally at adept using his fists, a gun or his watch garrote. There were enough clueless stiff upper lip



Colonial Office types for a cricket side, an outrageously campy gay accountant and a couple of good guys who the we got to know well enough that we were sad when they got killed.

Maggie Cheung was at the end of her amazing run of over fifty movies in six years when "First Shot" was made and it may have helped her decide that impersonating herself in Paris was preferable to walking through a role that consisted of looking fetching while acting peeved. The costume designer did a wonderful job for her—she first appeared in a clingy red knit dress, next in a well cut ivory suit and a few times in slacks made of some very thin material that outlined her lovely derriere perfectly. Her character was unnecessary to the story and possibly included either as a relief from the otherwise testosterone fueled mayhem or for simple star power. If it was the latter it worked, since I probably would not have bothered seeing it if she hadn't been on the credits.

The fight scenes were generally well done, quick and brutal and someone was lying dead at the end of each of them. Weapons included fists, feet, policemen's batons, the porcelain top of a toilet tank, a sledge hammer and a huge log. The very first fight set a tone of ruthlessness and barbarity that was hard to top, taking place in the extremely closed-in space of a darkened stairwell. Hong Kong directors and fight choreographers are masters at using tiny, almost claustrophobic areas to heighten the viciousness of battles to the death and this was an excellent example of that. Gun fights were barely acceptable—lots of rounds fired by everyone, very few hits other than by Baat Leung-Gam who only missed once. Ti Lung survived a bullet to the brain but Kong Man-Sing and Andy Hui did not.

There was incessant talk of busses in the first thirty minutes of so of the movie—people were constantly telling each other that the bus full of corrupt money was leaving and if you didn't want to be on it you shouldn't stand in front of it. Additionally bomb left on a bus showed far Mr. Chiu's evil hand could reach into the top levels of Hong Kong government. Thankfully this image pattern was abandoned while it was still just annoying.

Recommended, but not very highly—distinguished mainly by Maggie Cheung's costume changes and Baat Leung-Gam's over the top insane killer. (by Ewaffle of HKMDB)

**Fist Power (Hong Kong, 2000: Aman Chang)** - I remember that quite a few years back, there was a TV movie that came on television that as far as I know, was based on a true story. It was a movie about a couple who took a school hostage. The man, who had a few screws loose, had a vision of a "brave, new world" and in order to "realize" this vision, got some guns and made a bomb out of household materials and sequestered a bunch of students in a classroom and...you know the drill. The movie starred Robert Urich as the hero, the school principal who's heroic act was mainly snooping around the school ineffectually.

Well, *Fist Power* probably can be considered a movie in the same vein, except that the drama and tension are replaced with high-octane martial arts fighting. Actually, among the terrorist/*Die Hard*-clone movies, this one is actually fairly unique in the way it portrays the hostage situation. It's rather interesting. The hostage situation is more of a maguffin rather than anything else. It spurs our hero (Zhao Wen-Zhuo) into action but almost none of the set-pieces that follow are directly related to the hostage situation. That's most likely due to the fact that the film's villains are in reality not the men holding the school hostage. But, we'll get to that later.

Rather than explain the events of the movie as they happen, I'll give you the backstory in one general summary. A woman got pregnant by a man named Chiu who soon left her. She was then taken in by a (presumably at the time) soldier for the British army named Charles (Anthony Wong) who took care of her and her son as if it was his. After several years, the woman left Charles with her son. Now that Hong Kong belongs to China, Charles works as a truck driver. One day, the child's mother returns with Chiu, the boy's biological father. The two have officially married and they need the boy in order to get an inheritance from Chiu's father. Charles gets in an argument and the two end up taking the kid by force.

From there, Charles goes to the police and tries to report the occurrence as a kidnapping. However, the police are unwilling to do anything about it since Charles isn't the biological father. Upset that he's being deprived of the boy, Charles decides to take things into his own hands. He gets together some of his old army buddies and they take over a classroom at a school and set up bombs around the perimeter. He demands that he see his son again before a set time and if not, he'll blow up the classroom along with everyone inside.

Enter Brian Cheuk, a security specialist working out of Shenzhen on the Mainland. I didn't know this, but it seems that the job description of a security specialist is "go into high security buildings and test the guards' kung fu." Only in the Orient could a job be so fun to watch. Anyways, Brian in Hong Kong celebrating his birthday with his family.

He discovers that the classroom that has been taken over is his nephew's classroom. Having met Charles coincidentally before, Brian tells the police this, who detain him as a suspect.

Brian escapes with the help of a snooty reporter (Gigi Lai) and Sinma (Sam Lee), Charles' ex brother-in-law. Soon the three are in a race against time to find the boy before Charles blows up the school.

As I was saying earlier, this whole terrorist situation is simply a macguffin. You see, this summary covers about only thirty minutes of the movie. The next hour throws all of this out the window (and any credibility that the movie may have had) in favor of non-stop action. What happens is that no sooner than Brian finds the boy, Chiu starts sending legions and legions of goons to get the boy back. I don't know if this is bad writing or what, but I find it something else when you can make a non-stop action movie about a hostage situation and still have almost no action scene regarding the terrorists themselves.

So Chiu is the main "villain" of the movie, whereas Charles is played off as a guy not unlike Ed Harris from *The Rock*: an honorable man and soldier who's unable to cope with the unfair things that happen in this world and take extreme measures to find "justice." In this movie, I think we sympathize with Charles almost from the get-go and he's never established to be a bad man in any way. That's most likely why few action scenes involve Charles, because if Brian fought against him, it would make Brian look unsympathetic and Charles less of a "good guy." If you look at the *The Rock*, Ed Harris was sympathetic but most of the other terrorists weren't, thus justifying the many action scenes in the movie. I find it an interesting contrast.

Unfortunately, one of the film's flaws is the direction. Director Aman Chang seems to not have a lot of style as a director. This especially shows in the scenes at the school. They're all filmed without any style whatsoever. Actually, the terrorist scenes seem almost like an afterthought, which they are, considering their importance in the movie on the whole. However, scenes that should be full of drama and suspense (i.e. Charles' initial assault on the school and his final reunion with his son) are filmed in a rather bland manner.

Any believability that this movie has is instantly discarded after Brian goes off in search of the boy. This is evidenced in not only the over-the-top nature of the fight scenes and encounters with Chiu's goons, but in the inclusion of seemingly out-of-place slapstick humor. However, that can be easily understood when I say that Wong Jing is the film's producer. Wong Jing has produced some of the weirdest and most bizarre concoctions of slapstick comedy, strong violence, and high drama ever seen. The humor here is out of place, although it's infrequent enough to not distract too much. Thankfully, I've seen enough Hong Kong movies (and worse ones at that) that the few brief moments of slapstick didn't distract me in the least. It's not like *My Father is a Hero*, which took a touching and serious action film and almost spoiled it with a scene where Jet Li uses his son as a human yo-yo.

After I watched *Mahjong Dragon*, I declared Zhao Wen-Zhuo to be the "King of Onscreen Stoicism." The guy was capable of being stoic under any situation in any film. He seems a lot more relaxed in this movie. He comes across as being a bit more closer to being a normal person than his previous efforts. Anthony Wong, who plays Charles, is one Hong Kong's most respected veteran actors and has been around since the late 80s/early 90s. I think the guy is most famous for being a psychopath, although I imagine that was something akin to early career type-casting. Now he does it all: drama, comedy, action, etc. He doesn't do a bad job this time; he's just kind of there. I don't think the direction really helped all that much.

I wanted to comment on Gigi Lai. I've seen her in two other movies: the borderline insane *Kung Fu Cult Master* and the stupid and pointless *Legend of the Flying Swordsman*. She plays a snobby reporter in this movie, much like Chingmy Yau in *High Risk*, another over-the-top terrorist film featuring Wong Jing's involvement. Actually, she looks like a young Chingmy Yau. However, she doesn't have the charisma that her colleague had. Nor does she share any chemistry the way Chingmy shared chemistry with Jet Li in their movies together. Actually, to draw the comparison further (and to be a lot more unfair), Chingmy beat her up early on in *Kung Fu Cult Master*, which pretty much sums up what I think about her. I talk so much about Chingmy because she was my favorite actress for quite a while.

One of the characters I found really interesting was the boy's mother. She was actually quite unlikeable, but not because she was a straight-up prick. Actually, she was hypocritical money-grubbing slimeball, but she tried hard to hide it from her son. She almost always talked in soft tones and tried to put on the appearance of a caring mother, but we know all along that she's just after the money. The difference between her and Chiu is that Chiu doesn't hide it, she does. Chiu is a jerk and a crook, but he never tries to hide it. She's just false. Oh, Gigi does give her what's coming to her.

Choreography chores were given to Ma Yuk-Sing. Ma was a protégé of Ching Siu-Tung, working on a lot of his 90s wuxia films, and had recently received critical acclaim for his work on the action-packed cop film *Big Bullet*, which earned him a nomination for the Best Action Design award at the Hong Kong film awards. His work here isn't quite as polished as Corey Yuen's *Mahjong Dragon* or Ching Siu-Tung's choreography in *Blacksheep Affair* but it gets the job done quite well. It's fast and furious and at times, quite creative. The fighting occasionally gets repetitive, but bearing in mind how much I want to see Zhao Wen-Zhuo in action and get a fair showing, I can't say that I was really disappointed.

Zhao Wen-Zhuo is looking in fine form this time around. He had suffered a serious injury in 1995 while making *Once Upon a Time in China 5* and oftentimes injuries can limit a person's physical abilities. However, in this movie he's releasing flurries of punches, aerial kicks, and doing the splits like some Van Damme on speed. Ooh, I love it. The photography doesn't always do him justice; there are too many quick cuts at inopportune times. However, his balletic agility and high-quality booting skills are enough to give me a big smile on the face. The movie has more hand-to-hand action than *Mahjong Dragon* and *Blacksheep Affair*, although it's not quite up to the same standard.

In a movie full of fighting, there are a couple of specific scenes that really stand out. One is a fight between Zhao and about a dozen goons armed with metal baseball bats in a mock police station. He takes them all on without breaking a sweat, using his surroundings to his advantage, and then takes on a superkicking Jewel Li. Good stuff. The finale has Zhao busting out some great kicking skills against some white guy. Also good stuff. The "second finale" is a gratuitous fight, but it's really fun. Zhao's family (played by Kung Fu legends Lau Kar-Wing, Cheng Pei-Pei, and Kara Hui Ying-Hung) shows up at the school to fight Chiu's most powerful men. Zhao bows out of this fight to let the older generation remind us why they had been so loved: Lau uses some good ol' fashioned hung gar, Cheng Pei-Pei uses some internal styles, and Kara uses some nice bootwork. It's out of place, unnecessary, but it's quite fun.

There is one glaring flaw in the movie, especially in the fight scenes. It's the soundtrack. For a movie as fast-paced and furious as this movie is, there's no good music to compliment the action and enhance the "high-octane" feel of it all. Most of the action in the movie is accompanied by some generic jazz/saxophone music which kind of bogs down the pace rather than add to it.

*Fist Power* comes across as an odd duck; it's neither as over the top as many typical Hong Kong action films nor as suspenseful and overblown as many American terrorist films. It's a rather bland film, which leaves it totally dependent on its action scenes. Let me remind that the reason I bought this movie was to be able to watch Zhao Wen-Zhuo plow through legions of bad guys like a reaper through a corn field. With that reason in mind, I was for the most part satisfied and I can say that *Fist Power* delivers in spades. It isn't quite the movie that I've been waiting for Zhao to make, but it's still pretty fun. (by Blake Matthews)

**Flaming Brothers (Hong Kong, 1987: Joe Cheung)** - This 1987 "Heroic Bloodshed" film followed on the heels of the success of *A Better Tomorrow* and it too delves into the world of the triads and ritualistic male bonding. In most ways it falls very short of *A Better Tomorrow*, but it has some interesting aspects to it.

The three main male actors all were major stars in their respective decades. Patrick Tse was a major heartthrob during the 1960s (and is the father of current heartthrob Nicholas Tse), Alan Tang was one of the top romantic stars of the 1970's (in particular in Taiwan where he teamed up a few times with Brigitte Lin) and of course Chow Yun Fat was the biggest male actor of the 1980s. All three are terrific actors and seeing them together is a treat.

A year before his directorial debut *As Tears Go By*, Wong Kar-wai penned this script for producer, Alan Tang. I can't say there is anything in the script that gives a hint of the promise of things to come from Wong – but that is not too surprising as directors tend to often dramatically change the substance and mood of scripts to their own liking. What is clear though is that Tang thought enough of it and of Wong to produce both *As Tears Go By* and *Days of Being Wild*.

In many of these male-bonding films, there is often much conjecture about the subtext of homosexuality within (much of it nonsense in my opinion). Though perhaps inadvertent, the English title "Flaming Brothers" almost seems to mock this. What was the Chinese title – "No, We're Just Good Friends"? In a number of instances in the film other characters make pointed references that unless the two friends – Tang and Chow – find girlfriends everyone will think they are lovers. Needless to say, they always take offense at this suggestion!

Outside of this though, the film is often flat and slow moving. Almost from the beginning you know exactly where the film is heading – but it takes a circuitous path getting there. There are a couple decent action sequences – but the film becomes bogged down in three love stories – the men’s ones with the women – and of course the underlying one with each other.

Tang and Chow grow up together – both orphans – and depend completely on one another into their adult years. They open a ritzy nightclub in Macao, but almost immediately run into trouble in the form of big triad honcho Patrick Tse and his right hand man Norman Tsui. They want to sell drugs in the club and Tang being the righteous man he is tells them that “pimping, robbing, gun smuggling” is all fine and dandy – but no drugs. Tse doesn’t take kindly to this rejection.

Tang goes to Thailand to complete an arms deal – and a good shoot out and a tuk-tuk chase occurs on the streets on Bangkok – and he falls in love with a lounge singer (Jenny Tseng). Back in Macao Chow comes across the little girl he knew as a child – all grown up into Pat Ha – and one look into her sweet honey dew eyes and he is ready to forsake the triad life and his life long friend. But the life pulls him back – as his friend, Alan, has to face Tse on his own – and Chow knows he has to be there too. The last twenty minutes of the film turns into one excellent guns a blazing blood bath. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Fox Hunter (Hong Kong, 1995: Stephen Tung Wei)** - Grittily disturbing, only some misplaced and failed stabs at comedy prevent this from likely being Leung’s best work ever. She plays rookie Hong Kong cop Jenny, following in the footsteps of her late father, who takes on an undercover mission aimed at trapping gangster Tung (Fung). While it succeeds, Tung escapes, and takes vengeance on Jenny, killing her uncle in brutal fashion. This, in turn, pushes her over the edge, and she teams up with his pimp-turned-informant (Chan), who is feeling aggrieved after having not received his promised reward from the authorities. The pair head to China, where Tung is hiding out, only for Jenny to rapidly wear out her welcome with the local cops and their commander (Guang). Worse is to follow, when Tung finds out they are on his tail, he begins a campaign of terrorism, culminating in wiring an entire shopping mall with explosives. He’s very fond of explosives...

The cover (right) is surely among the least accurate I’ve seen, depicting a frothy concoction mercifully not present – and the movie contains absolutely no pineapples at all, in case you were wondering. In particular, they really shouldn’t have tried to make Chan’s character any kind of comedic foil, because it just doesn’t work. During the early going, I was praying for his rapid, painful demise, though he does become more sympathetic in the second half. Fortunately, the other aspects outweigh the ill-considered negatives. Though this is one of only four films directed by Tung Wai (including an all time HK favorite, *Magic Cop*), he has a long pedigree as an action director – among his works previously covered here are *Mulan*, *Reign of Assassins* and *The Assassin* – and that’s where this movie shines. Particular standouts are a sequence where Tung shows up at the apartment complex where our pair are hiding out, and the final battle up and down the insides of the mall.

It’s clear throughout that Leung is doing most, if not all, her own stunts; the sequence where she uses a sofa to escape a grenade blast is so realistic, you can virtually smell her singed eyebrows. It also helps that she isn’t portrayed as all at some kind of superwoman. Indeed, Tung is depicted as stronger, and far more brutal than the heroine, resulting in a genuine sense of peril for her – Jenny has to dig deep into her reservoir of tenacity simply in order to survive his onslaught, never mind prevailing over her nemesis. As well as the cover, the English-language title doesn’t do this justice, conjuring up a rather different set of images. While I get the sense of her going after a predator, something like *Wolf Hunter* might have been more appropriate, in terms of getting the hard-edged tone for which this aims. (by Girls with Guns.org)

**Framed (Hong Kong, 1989: Cheung Kwok Ming)** - Simon Yam and Alex Man star in this fairly routine police drama. Yam’s character is framed for drug possession and Man’s for a murder, both by their corrupt supervisor. After suspecting Yam for the murder, the two eventually join forces in a showdown with their boss. Yukari has a cameo role as a witness to the murder, and believes Alex Man to be the culprit. When he escapes from police interrogation and confronts her at a health club where she works as an aerobics instructor, she delivers a vicious physical beating that represents an arrogant display of physical prowess and talent. It ends only when she electrocutes herself by kicking out a neon sign. Unfortunately, her role is not developed, and she is quickly shot during the final confrontation. However, she is worth watching for a form-hugging leotard and a great fight cameo. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Freedom Run Q (Hong Kong, 1992: Allan Fung)** - Freedom Run Q stars two of Hong Kong's dweebiest male actors – Alfred Cheung and Lawrence Cheng – in a rather bland buddy cop comedy that comes to life only when Yvonne Yung Hung pops in to show her winning smile or during the very solid action scenes. The action choreography comes from Dion Lam who was also involved in the action work in some terrific films – Shanghai Shanghai, The Stone Age Warriors, The East is Red, Black Mask, Storm Riders and Red Cliff – the action here is basic but quite enjoyable. As to Yvonne, this was before she jumped bosom first into Cat. III films and she is remarkably cute and graceful, showing her dance training to good effect in her martial arts moves. If she had perhaps been mentored in the same way as Chingmy Yau by Wong Jing, she looks like she may have done well in many of those silly romantic or kung fu comedies that he produced – but the bright lights of Cat. III beckoned.

I have always found the films of Alfred Cheung and Lawrence Cheng a bit of a chore to sit through – often playing bespectacled yuppie nerds - and having the two of them together feels like a joke in itself – especially as tough (though not particularly competent) cops chasing after drug dealers. They meet cute as both go undercover and try to sting one another in a drug deal – Alfred in cringe worthy melting black face. After this they team up to find the source of Angel Dust that is coming into Hong Kong. They and their female supervisor (Elizabeth Lee) suspect a Mainland martial arts troupe from Yunan may be smuggling the drugs in. The Master of the troupe is played by the great veteran Lam Kau and one of his disciples is Yvonne, who is an expert in throwing knives and other sundry martial arts skills.

She is planning to defect and meet up with her brother but she attempts to do so right in the middle of a drug deal that becomes a drug bust when Alfred and Lawrence charge in. She unknowingly ends up with the bag of drugs and both the cops and the bad guys are after her – all leading to a few well played out action scenes and some cute chop stick battles between her and her kung fu brother. This was fairly average stuff back then and didn't exactly bring in hordes of ticket buyers. It is helped a bit by the presence of some other veteran actors – Bill Tung as Lawrence's wealthy father and the wonderful Jeanette Lin Tsui as Alfred's mother who just wants her boy to become a doctor. There are also some pointed critical references to the impending Handover and I believe Alfred Cheung, who co-wrote the script, has been a staunch advocate of political freedom in Hong Kong. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Full Alert (Hong Kong, 1997: Ringo Lam)** - The operative term when it comes to *Full Alert* (1997) is "gritty." Full Alert was the first movie Ringo Lam made when he returned to Hong Kong after making *Maximum Risk* (1996), and he lets his darker instincts rule the screen.

During the opening credits we see the police quarantining an apartment building where the residents are getting sick. The source of the sickness turns out to be a dead body in the building's water tank. That gritty enough for you? If not, still upcoming is a rolling gun battle in the middle of a crowded street, someone beat to death with a shovel, what looks like the most painful non-fatal motorcycle accident ever, and an oh-so memorable scene where a cop has to retrieve his gun out of a barrel of soupy garbage.

Surly Inspector Pao (Ching Wan Lau) quickly arrests a suspect in the water tank murder, a man named Mak (Francis Ng). Mak quickly confesses to the murder but Pao thinks there is more to the story. Plans to an unidentified vault and bomb making equipment were found in Mak's apartment. Pao correctly deduces that Mak's willingness to confess to the murder is protect his partners in the vault job, and those partners, a violent Taiwanese gang, will try to free Mak from custody. Despite the police's efforts to the contrary Mak escapes from prison and Pao has to race to discover which vault Mak and his partners are planning on robbing. Things get personal when Mak begins sending Pao messages threatening Pao's wife and son.

As I said, *Full Alert* is high on grit, but it is a little low on logic. Mak apparently killed the man found in the water tank because the man designed the vault and knew its weakness, but why leave the body where it would bring down a huge police investigation? Why does the sergeant at a police roadblock let the Taiwanese gang through even though he recognizes one of them? This leads to a great car chase, one of the best I've seen in a while, but it seemed to me the whole thing could have been avoided easily. I'm also a little fuzzy on why characters continually give descriptions of the vault's security that turn out to be completely wrong when we actually see the vault. Perhaps, like many HK films, *Full Alert* was largely improvised and no one knew what anybody else said about the vault.

These flaws are easy to overlook, however. Pao is an interesting character, and the movie builds tension well as the heist approaches. The escalation of hostility between Pao and Mak climaxes with an ending as bleak as any in Lam's oeuvre, and that's saying something. Unfortunately he followed this movie up with the rather limp thriller *The*

*Suspect* (1998) and then eventually went back to making... sigh... Jean-Claude Van Damme movies. (by Scott Hamilton of Stomp Tokyo)

**Full Contact (Hong Kong, 1992: Ringo Lam)** - Ringo Lam's characters in *Full Contact* come in three flavors: bad guys with values, bad guys without values and victims. The first category is led by antihero Godfrey (Jeff or Gou Fei in other translations), one of Chow Yun-fat's most adversarial characters (not counting his Emperor role in *Curse of the Golden Flower*), who is a thief with a conscience yet a badass who can deftly ride a motorcycle and wield his balisong (butterfly) knife. He is set to marry Mona (Ann Bridgewater: *The Inspector Wears Skirts*) whose creative dancing career apparently does not make enough money. Look for a later dance scene resembling something out of Encino Man. Their friend Sam (Anthony Wong: *Exiled*) had to borrow money from a loan shark in Thailand named Hung to help pay for her Mother's burial (the translation states this but I think it meant internment costs). Since he cannot pay back he is in deep trouble until Godfrey helps him out. This causes Hung to put out a hit on him.

Sam has a job coming up that could make him and his friends a lot of money. It is with his cousin the overly-flamboyant homicidal homosexual Judge (Simon Yam: *PTU*) and his two lackeys the muscular Psycho (Frankie Chan) who has a penchant for big guns and loose women and his girlfriend the nymph Virgin (Bonnie Fu). This job involves busting an ammo truck worth millions of dollars. However, unbeknownst to Sam at the time they will get paid by Hung to take care of Godfrey and they will ultimately kill other pal Chung. In the meantime Mona has to take her Mom's ashes to Hong Kong. While Godfrey promises to marry her when she gets back, we all know that any promise before a big job will not be a promise kept. Those who see this will wonder why Godfrey takes this job when their initial meeting does not go well.

The operation goes almost exactly as planned for Judge. However, it is not as easy as he would have liked. While he finds Godfrey attractive he still has to kill him. This leads to an explosive showdown that leaves Godfrey with a missing thumb and trigger finger on his right hand, an innocent family dead and its daughter severely burnt. Sam capitulates in allowing this because he is a sniveling coward (his 180 degree personality change in the film is too unrealistic even though Anthony Wong still did a good performance with this character) and even shoots his friend and leaves him for dead\*. Why Judge doesn't check on the "death" of Godfrey, I do not know, but it allows him to live, take a cute dog, time to heal and time to learn to shoot with his other hand so he can exact revenge. His monomania allows time for Sam to sneak in on his girlfriend while everyone else thinks he is pushing up daisies.

Lam's directorial style is grittier than John Woo's operatic mode of direction, but the spirit of Woo is in this film. He refers to Woo in a few scenes from the briefcase ending analogous to *The Killer* to Chow Yun-fat spitting out his cigar before killing like Tequila spitting out his toothpick in *Hard-Boiled*. While the action is not as hyperbolic as Woo's his characters are more exaggerated. Godfrey becomes a vessel for brotherhood in his quest for vengeance with his own code of conduct. He is not only taking revenge for a lost friend, he is taking revenge for a family wrongly slaughtered and a disfigured daughter. Ultimately this film feels like a mixture of John Woo and Chang Cheh – it fits well in the subgenre of heroic bloodshed. With a plot that could easily have been taken out of an old-school martial arts film what better place for Godfrey to get over his injuries than in a monastery with the help of a monk.

The one-dimensional characters are one of the biggest weaknesses with this film. When Judge states one sentence late in the film on why he acts the way he does it comes a little late – though Simon Yam's performance is a high point in this film. Virgin and Psycho are completely over-the-top as well but they do not have the finesse that Judge has. But in their excess with Psycho's muscle-bound dumbbell and Virgin's oversexed vixen there is a camp factor that I found enhanced the emotions and nihilistic content of this film. There are also a few plot issues mentioned above that hurt the film as well. The triangle relationship between Sam, Mona and Godfrey annoyed me a bit but it did keep in line with the protagonist's revenge motif.

Where this movie excels is the gunplay scenes, fight action scenes choreographed by longtime Shaw Brother's actor/action director Lau Kar-wing (*Knockabout*) and the excellent direction of Ringo Lam. He has a solid aesthetics in putting together scenes and creates a brute force style of action. The scene most mentioned from this film is club shootout between Godfrey and Judge. It sublimely employs the use of the bullet POV\*\* and is one scene I find myself going over a few times whenever I watch this film. There are also a couple of pyrotechnic scenes that are also quite extraordinary in explosive carnage and were a good reason for the overinflated budget.

This movie was not viewed as a success in Hong Kong. It was not a flop though since it made almost 17m HK dollars; however, since it cost over 23 million HK dollars it was a loss for Golden Princess. It actually has a better reputation here in the United States and along with *City on Fire* is its most popular. I highly recommend it to viewers who are interested in action cinema. If you take a character first approach to film then you can probably avoid it. But for

those who have gone this far in the review I figure you either have seen this movie or are interested in seeing this anyways. With great lines like “wash your butt and wait for me” and “go jack off in hell” I know you will like it.

The Columbia/Tristar release is a pretty good one except for extras in which it only has trailers. It has translated subtitles (no dubtitles) and a Cantonese soundtrack which unfortunately has a few parts missing that is replaced with the English soundtrack (the same thing happened on their *Drunken Master* release). This release is OOP and it also seems that all other releases except the newer Tai Seng release are also OOP. The Tai Seng R0 release has a Ric Meyers commentary while the HKL R2 release has a Bey Logan & Gary Daniels commentary and a few interviews. If and when I get them I will post my feelings on the quality of those extras.

\* I have read from a few sources that there was a deleted scene where Anthony Wong’s character Sam is supposed to cut out the eyeballs of Godfrey and give them to Judge. Sam, of course, gives him the eyeballs of a different victim. I am not going to write here what Judge is supposed to do with the eyeballs though. It does remind me of a similar scene in *The Crow* and perversely makes sense because Judge is always commenting on Godfrey’s eyes.

\*\* Wrongly mentioned in many reviews and sources as the first time a bullet POV was filmed. It was used in Michael Crichton’s *Runaway* (1984) and Bey Logan mentions in *Hong Kong Action Cinema* that it was used before this film in HK in *Proud and Confident* (1988). It is always difficult to figure out when a first is for cinema. Ringo Lam would later use the same type of shot in *Maximum Risk* starring Jean-Claude Van Damme. (by Masterofoneinchpunch of KFF)

**Fun and Fury (Hong Kong, 1992: Frankie Chan)** - This Frankie Chan helmed film has the look of having been knocked off fairly quickly as it wanders around for the first hour in an aimless goofy daze before it settles down with the action scenes that one expects from a Frankie Chan film. There isn’t very much going on here, but it does have a solid cast.

Leon Lai is a Singaporean cop – and he has come to Hong Kong with his girlfriend, Vivian Chow, to meet her father (Kent Cheng) who is a top triad figure. It turns out that back in Singapore Leon caused the death of the brother of White Tiger a vicious HK triad killer (played by Norman Tsui) and Kent Cheng is afraid that White Tiger will take offense with him if he finds out that his daughter is engaged to Leon. So he does everything he can to sabotage the young lover’s relationship – even hiring Sharon Kwok (in an engaging and sexy turn) to frame Leon as her lover.

The first hour of the film revolves around this rigmarole – the highlight being a dance scene in which Leon and Vivian and also Frankie (who plays Leon’s buddy) and Sharon show some nice dance steps in a disco. Finally, in the last thirty minutes the action kicks in when White Tiger and his gwielo minions kidnap Vivian and hold her hostage.

It is of course up to Leon and Frankie to get her back and this leads to some enjoyable if not topnotch ruckuses between our heroes and Norman Tsui, Kim Maree Penn and two other gwielos. At the very most this is a mild diversion – and it does not contain the energy or intensity of some other Frankie Chan productions such as *Burning Ambition* or *Outlaw Brothers*. I think that is Vivian and Leon singing a duet during the end credits. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Funny Family (Taiwan, 1986: Kevin Chu Yen-Ping)** - The son and daughter of feuding neighbors each leave to find their fortune in the city. In this slapstick Taiwanese comedy, they undergo a series of misadventures, but eventually find their respective mother and father (who are, naturally, living together). The father’s sporting goods store faces a series of challenges from a Japanese competitor, involving bowling, football, tennis and boxing tournaments. The young couple use their kung fu skills to carry the day in each match. Yukari appears in a non-speaking cameo role as a Japanese boxing champion in a tag team match. She looks fabulous, heavily tattooed Yakuza-style, and makes the most of her few screen moments to display superb athleticism and martial arts skills. In keeping with the general tone of the movie’s humor she’s known as “Tempura” and the “Yellow Peril” - an example of the anti-Japanese sentiment that would follow her entire career. It is a pity that she did not sport the tattoos to this extent in her later movies. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Gambling Baron (Hong Kong, 1994: Richard Yeung)** - Triad film about two small-time gangsters (they do gambling stalls and protection pay, but shy away from prostitution and drug dealing), played by Roy Cheung and Max Mok, who cross a rival, played by Jimmy Lee. After some conflicts, Max finds himself hiding from the police in Hong Kong. That leaves Roy to take care of the turf and deal with Lee, with tragic results. The fight scenes aren’t bad and Max Mok has enough action experience to sell himself as one of the more powerful and intimidating fighters in the

territory. The highlight is a fight in a narrow construction area between Roy, Max, kickboxer Billy Chow and a bunch of stuntmen armed with metal bars and choppers. Billy Chow gets in the best moves with his high kicks. Roy, in all of his action sequences, looks gangly and uncoordinated, convincing only when he has a gun in his hand. This fight, surprisingly enough, ends with the heroes getting broadsided by a moving van! Who would have thought? The movie mainly falters in the finale, which tries to tie up all the loose ends in about 8 minutes. I'm guessing the filmmakers simply ran out of money by this point. Thus, instead of a big set piece where Max Mok dishes out the justice only a sharpened machete can, we have him standing still firing an AK-47 until everybody is dead. It's an unsatisfying way to end an otherwise satisfying crime flick. (by Blake Matthews)

**Gambling Ghost (Hong Kong, 1991: Clifton Ko Sum)** - Paul (Sammo Hung) is a son who wants an easy life, and thinks swindling is the way to get it. His father (also Sammo Hung) is an honest man who detests his son's antics. His deceased grandfather (again Sammo Hung) had a reputation as a cheater and suffered for his ways. Paul invokes the spirit of his grandpa to help him become the king of cheaters. Grandpa wants Paul to take revenge on his killers, and helps him scheme his way into a deal with them. But when it goes bad, both Paul and his dad have to settle the score.

Fight #1 --- Paul vs a gang - Meh. Nothing special here and it's short. There's a few front kicks. Not the Sammo-in-action we are used to seeing.

Fight #2 --- Paul vs gang at shipyard - Not bad. This is a little more like it. It has more of the HK style action we like. The choreography is good with elements of classical kung fu in places. Some good stunts and falls in a couple of places.

Fight #3 --- Grandpa vs assassins - Short but good. SH plays a Japanese businessman in traditional dress. Some good kicks and a little bo staff action, too.

Fight #4 --- Paul vs Thug #1 (Robert Samuels) - Best fight! SH takes out a few goons and then takes a beating from RS who is quite the kicker. SH has some good falls. Wish this had been a little more of a mix-up, but the choreography is good and fast. SH ends it with a nice Crane style kick a la "The Karate Kid".

Fight #5 --- Dad vs Thug #2 (Billy Chow) - Wow! Sweet fight! SH busts out a mix of tai chi and wing chun while taking on BC. This is some classic kung fu going on here with great choreography and a nice finishing move.

Fight #6 --- Dad vs monk (James Wong) - Oh, this is killer! SH brings on more wing chun and tai chi. Some great falls and another nice finishing move.

Well, let me just say that the movie is a bit of a struggle to get through. It's far more comedic than action driven. Shame, too, because more action would've made this one of Sammo's classic films. It is nice to see him play multiple roles, and there's even a dust-up between his father and son characters, but again, it is more for comedic value. And for me, the comedy just ain't working here, and I find Sammo to be quite funny. (No dance number, which is surprising. That would've been a nice bonus, too.)

The funniest bit was an exchange at the beginning. Because the film was made in 1991, one of its themes is the disparity between Hong Kong and Mainland China with digs at the Communists and Hong Kong's eventual return to the Chinese government. I'm surprised this was allowed, but then Hong Kong's film industry was pretty much writing its own ticket at the time. Maybe it's the translation for the English dub. Maybe they really said this in the Chinese language. I don't know, but this cracked me up.

*Mainland Chinese Woman: "I work for the Justice Department."*

*Sammo: "Oh, in China? I didn't know they had justice there."*

That owned me.

The action was slow to build up, but when it does, it delivers for the most part though the fights are sort of short. Even Nina Li gets in on the action by throwing some nice kicks towards the end. The longest and best fight is Sammo's bout with Samuels. It's a doozy, and this film needed more of that. This isn't his best film, but it certainly is worth seeking out for the end fights if nothing else. These do not disappoint except that you'll wish there was more



and these were longer. Definitely one for completionists like myself, and I'll certainly be watching it again...well, fast-forwarding to the fights anyway.

Hunt this one down, people, and GET IT!!!!!! (by Scott Blasingame)

**Gangland Odyssey (Hong Kong, 1990: Michael Chan Wai-Man)** - *Gangland Odyssey* is a decent Triad / Yakuza story directed by Chan Wai Man about the war between the two countries' mafias and the family and their close friends caught in the middle. Chan's Brother Pu (a.k.a. Yoshida) plays both sides. After the opening flackback, Chan leaves his character out of play for awhile to let Andy Lau and the remaining cast do their thing.

Let's talk about this flashback sequence for a moment, any ritual and ceremony is interesting to me. Brother Pu and his peers are asked to draw the Death Straw to see which one of them gets to murder their rivals. No surprise, it's Pu and the subsequent honorifics he does before the altar are neat. The murder spree itself is performed employing a good deal of slow motion and glory shots (perhaps a reflection of Chan's work with Sun Chung?) The murder of their triad rivals forces Pu to flee to Japan for many years leaving behind family. Meanwhile, Pu inserts himself into Yakuza society without a hitch.

Cut to 16 years on, when the Yakuza make moves on Pu's old triad territory in Hong Kong; while the usual youth versus elder infighting erupts within the triads. Pu and his old retired cop friend will not let the yakuza incursion pass, but they're up against enemies on all sides. Andy Lau has some nice moments here as a young triad in Pu's old crew and Lau's love affair with Pu's daughter Cindy almost makes the drama work.

When the much needed action erupts, it is more kinetic, fierce and over the top. *Gangland Odyssey* doesn't linger on culture of the triads and the yakuza too much beyond the opening scene and how both gangs fight. Chan Wai Man directs the drama and action well enough, but you're left wanting action rather than drama. That's unfortunate given Chan's work with Sun Chung. Sun handled drama easily and almost always made the action a compelling part of his characters' existence. (Incidentally, SC's production design choices are good here, especially in the final fight.)

There are two excellent fights from action director Danny Chow Yun-Gin between Chan and his enemies / former cohorts, (including a silly one in a hotel room.) The final fight is the way to handle Yakuza disagreements, with katanas. There's an unnecessary scene of pit bulls fighting for sport which puts a bit of a damper on things, I'd rather watch Chan Wai Man kick, punch and slash the crap out of his foes than see dogs tearing each other apart.

On second viewing, this isn't holding up too well for me. It suffers when Chan Wai-Man isn't on screen. He gets solid performances from the actors portraying his immediate family and triad / police associates, but the story and pacing don't quite click.

If you enjoy HK crime dramas, you may like this. I prefer the acting choices/risks CWM took in late 70s to mid 80s myself. (by Lady Jin Szu-Yi of KFF)

**Gen-X Cops (Hong Kong, 1999: Benny Chan)** - If you've read any of the reviews of Hong Kong movies we've posted in the past year or two, then you've no doubt picked up that we've been pretty down on the whole industry since round about the mid 1990s. I've gone into a great deal of detail as to exactly why the industry in Hong Kong collapsed after achieving such monumental heights, so I'm not going to reiterate here, especially since this review is an excellent way to stop writing about the recent failures of Hong Kong action cinema and shift instead to more optimistic writing about future success.

I think we're finally seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. The past few years have seen a number of fresh new faces finally emerging from the ashes, and it looks like things in Hong Kong are starting to finally get interesting again after we've endured years of cut-rate Wong Jing stinkers and wire-laden "kungfu" films that didn't seem to ever have any actual kungfu. Pieces are finally in place for Hong Kong to reclaim the action cinema throne it toppled off of (and subsequently left vacant since everyone else was sucking just as bad) sometime in the mid 1990s, and after years of hibernating in my little "golden age of kungfu" shell, I'm finally poking my head out and seeing what all this rumbling is about -- not to mention finally seeing the few good films from the latter half of the 1990s that I missed during my Hong Kong action film sabbatical.

Some of the people making folks stand up and take notice again are familiar faces who have finally paid their dues or are coming into their own, ready to shine now that the old guard is more or less retired or relocated. I'm thinking specifically here of guys like director Johnny To and stars Aaron Kwok, Jordan Chan, and Lau Ching-wan. Lau's already achieved a degree of fan and critical acclaim, and he seems to have all the right stuff to become the big dog in action cinema. He's got the look that is scruffy yet dignified, he's got emotional depth, and he's got a lot of great films under his belt. Jordan Chan, of all the new batch of Hong Kong young-bloods, is my favorite. He's engaging, and unlike Ekin Cheng, he can actually act. Aaron Kwok has been around for a long time now, and he's finally getting old enough to shake the "pretty boy" image that held him back throughout most of the 1990s. A few more years and a few more pounds, and he should be set to shine.

On the directorial front, guys like Johnny To, Benny Chan, Teddy Chan, Dante Lam, and Wilson Yip may not be the John Woo, Tsui Hark, or Sammo Hung of the new millennium, but then none of those guys got famous by being the next Chang Cheh or Liu Chia-liang either. They blazed new paths, took chances, and recreated the game with a new set of rules. After several years in the abyss, with people wallowing in the styles and retreaded visuals of the past, we finally have a new crop of directors who are once again challenging convention, shaking things up, and quite possibly laying the foundation for the next Hong Kong new wave. It's an uncertain but exciting time, and I feel myself finally getting back that sense of anticipation and excitement I had in the early 1980s when I watched *Aces Go Places* for the first time. After so long with nothing to get anxious over, Hong Kong is finally a place I want to start paying attention to again.

The real trick to revitalizing a movie industry is in finding new talent and new directions that appeal to both past and future fans. You have to find young actors who don't seem absurd in their roles (Ben Affleck as an ex FBI agent? Denise Richards as a brilliant nuclear physicist? Who the hell is casting people in Hollywood???) but still appeal to kids. And you have to find young actors who aren't so insipid and annoying that they turn away older viewers in droves.

Director Benny Chan (*Who Am I*, *Big Bullet*) seems to have hit the right combination of youth and tradition with *Gen-X Cops*. It's not that big of a surprise, I suppose. Benny Chan has already given us one of the most even and consistent Jackie Chan films in years (*Who Am I*), as well as 1996's *Big Bullet*, easily one of the best action films around and a real gem in the Hong Kong action film crown. Throw Jackie Chan and Eric Tsang in as the behind-the-scenes mentor and producer, and you have what should be a recipe for success.

*Gen-X Cops* begins on the right foot -- by bothering to explain why we will be seeing such brash youngsters in important investigative positions. Hollywood, of course, worships youth, but when they cast a 22-year-old as a veteran cop or something, they just expect you to roll with it and not question how the hell this kid got where he was. *Gen-X Cops*, however, shows us a little more consideration by providing a simple but adequate explanation for why everyone is so young: the criminals are young, too. Hong Kong street gangs. The new generation of criminals finally coming out of high school and into the big leagues. You can't infiltrate a violent youth gang with a fifty year old cop. They tend to stand out. Eric Tsang, as the pariah police inspector Chan, figures that to combat this new generation of criminals, you're going to need a new generation of cops.

The primarily stumbling block for Inspector Chan is that everyone thinks he is a moron because he had mental problems in the past and still has a pronounced nervous twitch when he gets upset. Rival inspector To (Moses Chan), who looks eerily like Nick Cave (as if there is an un-eeerie way to look like Nick Cave), constantly berates Chan in front of the rest of the force, and no one seems all that interested in standing up for the little guy. When a gangland execution results in the death of an undercover cop, the police assign Chan to assemble "an elite unit" to take care of things, hoping that recruiting will keep him out of the way so Inspector To can work on the case without interruption.

Chan is determined to prove his worth, however, not to mention prove his intuition is correct when he thinks the younger brother (Daniel Wu as, umm, Daniel) of one of the murdered gangsters may be the very one who pulled the trigger, and may be the one who can lead them to big-time crime boss Akatora. Chan heads out to the police academy looking to recruit some fresh faces who will be able to infiltrate Daniel's gang of obnoxious young killers. Unfortunately, everyone Chan sees is a total square, my favorite being the guy who tries out for the special unit by simply standing in the room and flexing his massive muscles. Things seem hopeless until Chan stumbles across three recruits who are in the process of being expelled for a variety of reasons, all of which boil down to "being uppity" and "exposing the idiocy of your elders." Needless to say, these three misfits are exactly what Chan has been looking for.

Nicholas Tse, Sam Lee, and Stephen Fung star as Jack, Alien, and Match respectively. All three are decent enough actors, though the roles they play here are about as thick as a page out of a comic book. Since this movie never aspires to be anything more than stupid fun, I can live with one-dimensional characters -- which describes just about

everyone in this film with the possible exception of Inspector Chan, and that may only be because Eric Tsang is such a veteran at bringing life to absurd characters. Besides him you've got the three cops -- the goofball, the slick guy, and the moody guy. You've got the obnoxious police inspector who wears the same coat as those creepy bald guys from *Dark City*. You've got the honorable old gangster and the scumbag selfish young gangster. You've got the computer hacker girl and the sassy club girl with a British accent. No one is winning any awards for innovation, but as long as the movie keeps everyone moving around enough not to notice, that's fine by me. And the movie does achieve that very thing.

Jack, Alien, and Match are given new, hipper identities after indulging in a little gratuitous skydiving, which had to be done for two main reasons. First, you can't have a Gen-X movie without some extreme sport, and second, you have to establish that they know how to skydive so that can be used later in the film. They go undercover to follow Chan's hunch that Daniel is the trigger man behind the recent murders, and that he is in league with Japanese yakuza who is pulling the strings. Daniel is played by American-born Daniel Wu, who went to Hong Kong on a holiday after graduating from college and ended up making movies there. Just goes to show you kids -- if you put off real life and goof off a little more, you just might make it.

Wu is a decent enough actor, but like everyone else, he plays pretty much a one-note character. His job is to primarily walk around making "angry man" faces while wearing a jacket with no shirt on. You can always recognize a slick up and coming gangster by the fact that he'll be wearing a jacket with no shirt. Be glad those guys in *The Sopranos* don't do the same. Why is it that all those Hong Kong gangsters are always walking around in million dollar designer clothes, while Mafia guys walk around in cheap track suits? Well, I guess comfort is a big consideration for them. And who the hell is going to walk up to Paulie Walnuts and tell him he should dress a little hipper?

Match gets on Daniel's good side by hitting on his girl, Jayme, who it turns out was also Match's girlfriend back in Canada. That whole thing was pretty damn stupid and pointless, but whatever. As is usually the case, Daniel is going to kill our three heroes but is eventually impressed by their bickering and in-fighting, which is what we call "pluckiness" when we are being polite. He gives them a job -- go kill rival crime boss Lok, played wonderfully by Francis Ng. Of course, the job goes haywire. For one, the boys realize that Lok is actually a pretty cool and honorable guy, and no one wants to kill him. When Daniel and his thugs show up, however, all hell breaks loose, and it gets even looser when some of Daniel's men defect and try to turn him over to Lok. Because duty calls for it, Match, Jack, and Alien end up rescuing Daniel instead of siding with Lok or the firestorm of cops who descend upon the place once all the shooting and exploding starts.

When one of the nameless, faceless cops is killed, Inspector To blames Chan and his band of misfits. Indeed, the entire police force seems indifferent-to-annoyed by Chan's inability to get the message that no one wants him actually working on the case. Chan has a breakdown and since they are not officially cops anymore, To succeeds in having Match, Jack, and Alien declared fugitives and suspected murderers. So now they got Japanese gangsters, Hong Kong gangsters, and their own police force after them.

To make matters worse, Match and Jack get in an argument over Match's continued flirtiness with Jayme, causing Match, Jayme, and Alien to split ways with Daniel and Jack. It's all a ruse of course, so that Alien and Match can secretly back Jack up as he and Daniel meet with the dreaded Akatora. It culminates in a big display of exploding stuff and shooting at the quaint villa belonging to Akatora. The Gen-X cops discover that he's planning to blow up a convention center in order to kill some famous visiting Japanese politician who used to be a criminal and betrayed Akatora's dad. Convolutioned? No doubt, but at this point you really can't care too much.

They attempt to stop Akatora from getting hold of the super-duper explosives he intends to use, which leads to a big fight in a mall where there happens to be a store in the very tall building that sells skydiving equipment. You figure out if this is where we learn the value of their skydiving skills. All things considered, it's far less groan-inducing than when that girl in *Jurassic Park II* had to use her amazing gymnastic skills as established earlier in the film to evade some raptors.

It all boils down to our lads and lass (computer hacker Y2K) facing off with Akatora in the bowels of the convention center while Inspector To's men run around and get shot. You know, one day I'm going to make a movie where the maverick cop fucks things up royally and the straight-laced, by the book partner ends up saving the day by sticking to regulations. Anyway, there is a cool part where Akatora taunts them with the detonator and says "If you can take this from me, you can stop the explosion." After a prolonged fight, the detonator gets dropped and everyone freaks out until Akatora says, "That's okay, I started it before I even told you you could stop me by taking it." That alone makes Akatora among the smarter criminals out there. Now if only he'd thought of just shooting his target instead of orchestrating a massively complex plan to blow up the entire building.

Will the young cops stop the crazy criminal? Will they manage to keep from getting shot by Inspector To and his men? Will they redeem the lost honor of Inspector Chan by proving him right? Will there be a big-ass fight and explosion at the end of the film? Well, what do you think?

In every sense of the phrase, this movie is "stupid fun," and it's easy to pick apart. There's an attempt to add an element of hipness to the events by mixing in English, but the English lines are so pitifully goofy and delivered with such awkwardness that they would have been much more effective had they simply not been used. It's really awful, and this is coming from someone who counts among his favorite film lines of all time the white guy from *Once Upon a Time in China* snarling "Who is this Wong Fei-hong? The Devil???" The story is needlessly roundabout.

What was the point of Match and Jayme having known each other in Canada? Just to explain why they fall in love so suddenly after he gives one of those "How could I take care of you when I couldn't even take care of myself?" speeches? It would have been more believable to just not worry about it and have them be two sexy young things who dig each other.

The film also spends all this time on Daniel's character only to have the actual villain be some other guy entirely. That's like writing a mystery novel where you get everyone to wonder "whodunit," then make the culprit someone who is only introduced in the final five pages -- or like making an entire slasher film then having the killer be someone's mom who isn't introduced until the final scene. It's cheap at worst, and in the case of *Gen-X Cops*, it's just pointless.

Need I even mention the disturbingly high number of "hold my gun sideways" moments there are. What the hell is with this? Who holds their gun like that? Some dumb-ass who has never fired a real weapon before and learned all his stuff from Mario Van Peebles, that's who! Still, I grit my teeth and just accept that for some bizarre reason, film makers continue to think this is cool. At least it's less ridiculous than the "cross my arms and shoot the guys on the left with my right hand, and vice versa." I guess if you are looking to be unable to aim your weapon and are hoping that it will jam up after squeezing off a few rounds, holding your gun sideways is a good thing.

With all that going wrong, and with the fact that the cast is basically the Hong Kong equivalent of a teenie bopper boy band (with Nick Cave lurking on the fringes scaring everyone), I fully expected to hate this movie. I was surprised when, not only did I not hate it, I actually had a lot of fun watching it. Dumb? You betcha. Style over substance? Completely superficial? Yesiree. Wouldn't argue with that. Sexy young cast? Sure, but at least the movie gave them a reason for being sexy and young instead of making us accept their youth at face value. With all those things wrong with the movie, it still managed to be thoroughly entertaining for a couple reasons.

For one, Benny Chan is a talented director, and he's an ace at finding the right pace for a movie and keeping things energetic even when nothing much is happening. He did it well in *Who Am I*, and he proved in *Big Bullet* that he has the skills to be a major force in the history of Hong Kong action cinema. He's got enough talent to elevate the film above the hackneyed, contrived, and completely predictable plot and turn it into something that is still exciting and energetic despite its massive number of short-comings.

The action is plentiful and is a decent mix of guns, explosions, hijinks, and fighting. No one is going to think these kungfu fights are going to revolutionize the industry, but they are fun and manage to compensate for the lack of real fighting skill in the cast without looking obvious.

The cast itself ranges from good to harmless. Moses Chan, Eric Tsang, and Francis Ng may all be playing one-note characters, but they still lend some sense of depth to them. It's no coincidence that these are also the most experienced actors in the film. Moses Chan as Inspector To is so thoroughly a complete and utter asshole that you can't help but like him. Eric Tsang manages to play slightly over the top without going to far, and Francis Ng is at his subtle best within the confines of his "honorable thief" character.

The young guys -- the cops, the girls, and Daniel Wu, are harmless. Sam Lee as Alien tends to be annoying, as all comic relief characters tend to be. Why is it that the comic relief guy is always the least funny of the bunch? But he's easy to discount since his character really does nothing other than stand to the side and shout in fear. Nick Tse and Stephen Fung are grade-A pretty boys -- the Aaron Kwoks of a new generation. I have not seen that many movies starring these two, but at least here they have the good sense to remain within whatever the limits of their skills may be by playing very familiar caricatures, which is not always a bad thing. It allows you to get to know an actor without immediately starting to hate them. Remember, we all thought Keanu Reeves was hilarious and talented until he tried to play characters outside his "Bill and Ted" range.

Daniel Wu is the most promising of the bunch. He's good looking and managed to bring a fair amount of intensity to his character. Granted, that probably wasn't that difficult but there's something to be said for knowing your role

and shutting the hell up, as they say. I don't like any of these guys as much as slightly more seasoned young actors like Jordan Chan and Takeshi Kaneshiro, but none of these guys have been in the caliber of films that those two have been in. *Gen-X Cops* is, after all, no *Fallen Angels* or *Downtown Torpedoes*. But I also remember how much I hated Jordan Chan when all I'd seen him in were those annoying *Young and Dangerous* movies. I don't suspect I'll ever grow to like Sam Lee very much, though I can see myself referring to him as the "Jerry Lewis of Hong Kong youth" in the near future.

I don't think any of these guys will become the man around whom to rebuild the industry -- I think that's something I reserve for Lau Ching-wan and, to a lesser extend, Jordan Chan -- but you have all the makings for a decent bunch of b-team stars once they get a little older and a little better. Despite the pretty boy appeal that no doubt went into their casting, if you look hard enough, there is some actual talent on display. Granted most of it belongs to the director and the old guys, but Daniel Wu, Nick Tse, and Stephen Fung are still easier to watch than Ben Affleck, Matt Damon, or any of the smarmy young Hollywood stars of today. Maybe that's just because I don't have to hear about them all the time.

As far as the gals go, there's no denying that both Jayme Ong (as Match's girl) and Grace Yip (as computer hacker Y2K) are knock-outs. Grace Yip has a couple more films under her belt than Jayme (who I think makes her debut here), and it shows. Jayme's lines, all of which are in English, are often flat and awkward. I don't know how much of this is her lack of acting talent and how much of it is simply the fact that the English language dialogue sounds like it was written by middle schoolers lacking a firm grasp of grammar and other finer points. Lucky for her the bulk of her lines are delivered during nightclub scenes where the blaring music obscures the fact that she's not a very good actress. Grace is much more engaging, but her character also has more to do than stand around being pretty.

And then there's the cranky fisherman who makes a cameo at the end of the film and dispenses some, "In my day, I was twice as lethal" wisdom. I'll just leave it at the fact that this guy has made cameo appearances before, but this is by far his funniest.

*Gen-X Cops* is the sort of movie you watch and are fully aware of the fact that it's completely ludicrous and not all that great, but at the same time it keeps you smiling and laughing. The action is decent, the cast operates within their boundaries, and the direction is great. Like I said, I went in fully expecting to hate this movie and pump out a scathing review about how much I hate snotty fashion-conscious kids these days -- and I do hate snotty, fashion-conscious kids these days -- but instead I found it was very easy to overlook the youth market "Gen-X" approach and just enjoy this as a brain dead but amusing action extravaganza. (by Keith Allison of Teleport City)

**Gen-Y Cops (Hong Kong, 2000: Benny Chan) - aka Jackie Chan Presents Metal Mayhem** - Should I ever be diagnosed with a brain tumor, should it ever be discovered that I can't sire children, should I ever go mad and start mumbling to strangers on the subway, should Hong Kong ever be attacked by a plague of locusts -- I will strongly suspect that it all began with this film. I am not sure if I have ever come across a film so barren of intelligence -- so devoid of any reason to exist -- so lacking in entertainment value -- as this embarrassing dreck. This is not just an embarrassment to those involved with the film, but to any one who has savored and cherished Hong Kong films for their unique characteristics. This film is a black hole in which all who enter have their life source diminished. I would gladly have flung the DVD from my apartment window into the darkness below, but for my concern that some innocent would find it and play it -- thus forever destroying their likelihood of becoming a Hong Kong film fan. Instead, I bury it beneath old dusty tax returns -- hopefully never again to see the light of day.

Watching this film de-combust for its seemingly never ending 105 minute running time is like sticking your head in a frazzled video game machine and being assaulted by armies of gammas, goblins and gerbils until your head is ready to explode. It's a live hopped up cartoon with Beavis and Buttthead over for dinner and a firecracker down your pants. It's like they let out the patients from a mental asylum and they decided to make a movie.

This film takes irritation to a whole new level. It begins with the acting. How bad is it? Let's just say the gweilos in the film are an oasis among the refuse -- they are at least very close to being real stock movie characters. The Chinese actors on the other hand in no way resemble human beings -- living or dead. Director Benny Chan elicits performances from them that should in all fairness bring their careers to a dead stop. It is as if he is pumping them with mood altering drugs and withholding light and food -- he was certainly withholding the dailies from them.

Let's begin with Sam Lee and Stephen Fung who play two cops like underage delinquents whose parents have gone away for the weekend. This comedy duo is from the inner circle of Hell. Sodom and Gomorrah were more fun than these two -- Nixon and Agnew were more amusing. The constant moronic banter and odd facial contortions make

you want to impose an acting ban on them for life. First time actor Edison Chan is not so much irritating as incomprehensibly bad – he delivers his lines like a schoolboy on lithium reciting his assignment to the class. Christy Chung pops in only often enough to make you cover your eyes with embarrassment. Perhaps the lowest point of her career is when she leads a cheer on the airport tarmac for the FBI – give me an “F”, give me an “B”, give me a break.

But none of this even begins to approach the magnitude of the ineptitude of the performance from the lead Chinese villain – Richard Sun – who apparently got confused and seemed to believe he was in a Snoop Doggy Dog video. You mainly wanted this guy to die just to shut him and his mistreated English up. Compared to this, Maggie Q and Anthony Wong come up like roses only because they don’t make total fools of themselves. Maggie is an FBI agent and though admittedly her fish net blouse and black bra don’t strike me as standard government issue – she plays her role straight – apparently she was not included in the same “joke” that nearly everyone else worked under. Anthony makes mainly a cameo appearance, but his slacker Mainland scientist is fairly amusing.

The film is of course in theory a sequel to *Gen X Cops*, but director Chan decides for some obscure reason to make this one a total farce with fewer charms than a Mafia hitman. Nicholas Tse and Grace Lam – in brilliant career moves – do not join up for this one though – but Sam Lee and Stephen Fung are not nearly so clever. The story feels as if odds and ends were filched from many better films. The screenplay (partially written by Bey Logan sadly to say) is clearly aimed at brain dead youths that drool over Brittany Spears commercials and breathlessly wait for the next version of Tomb Raider. It goes like this. An American company has developed a super robot that can be used to control crime. Now where did such an original idea come from I wonder? A Chinese computer whiz (Richard Sun) who was kicked off the developing team for his bad grammar, bad manners and even worse fashion style tries to take control of it when it goes to Hong Kong for an exhibition.

There Sun runs into his old homeboy now cop Edison Chan who he hypnotizes (since Chan always acts like he is in a trance it was difficult to tell the difference) to enter the code so that Sun can hack in and control the robot. But poor Edison is blamed for the theft and soon has the FBI (acting like arrogant American imperialists of course) and Maggie and her black bra after him. Sam and Stephen are also chasing after Edison but they innately know that anyone with his pop idol looks and puppy dog eyes can’t really be guilty of anything besides being in this film without ever taking an acting lesson in his life. Plus they need him around to make themselves look better. Christy cheers on the sidelines and looks puzzled as to why she is attempting a movie comeback and wondering whether showing her “points” might not be a bad idea after all.

I am nearly as puzzled as to how I finished this film with only a minor loss of brain cells and self-respect – but it does concern me that a film like this is actually being released by Columbia on unsuspecting American movie fans who may jump to the conclusion that Hong Kong films are all junk except for Jackie Chan and that *Crouching Tiger* movie. What does it say about the current state of HK action films when the best they could do for a high profile/high budget film was this? Is Edison Chan and his ilk really the future of Hong Kong films?

Also appearing just long enough to grab a check are Eric Kot, Vincent Kok and Rachel Ngan. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Ghost Punting (Hong Kong, 1992: Sammo Hung, Eric Tsang, Corey Yuen)** - The "Five Lucky Stars" attempt to help a restless ghost take revenge on the evil drug gang who took his life. At the same time, they want the ghost to help them get rich and court the four policewomen assigned to the case.

I'm just a sucker for the "thugs try to beat down on a guy who's actually a Kung Fu Master" trope. Here, Sammo Hung (the unexpected-expected Kung Fu Master) beats down on some thugs who really had it coming. I don't think I'll ever get tired of this!

Apart from that though I guess the *Lucky Stars* movies aren't really for me but I can't deny that I had a fairly good time once the beginning shenanigans were out of the way! Elaine Lui makes for a wonderful addition to the overall line-up too.

So the movie opens up with a small fight in the streets. Nothing too out of the ordinary here but a cool exchange.

Then we get the Sammo Hung vs thugs fight which I loved! He just beats the crap out of them alone, while the Lucky Stars watch. Lovely.

There's a short exchange at the mansion that's kinda cool but a bit weird.

Unless I'm forgetting a sequence, I think the next fight is the finale! That one was pretty good, and long, although a bit uneven. Definitely my favorite part of the movie. Sammo Hung showing off some good kicks and acrobatics! But he's not alone fighting. The Lucky Stars try out some stuff but mostly fail, and meanwhile Elaine Lui fights some other girl (not sure who), which was quite fun!

The rest of the movie, however, doesn't amount to much in my opinion. Just your typical *Lucky Stars* fare, along with a completely ridiculous supernatural element without any internal logic.

Stunts - 80/100 | Sammo Hung performs some pretty cool flips!

Narrative - 38/100 | Absolutely ridiculous.

Fight Choreography - 81/100 | Watching Sammo Hung fight is never a chore. The ladies are also pretty great too!

Enjoyment - 56/100 | About halfway through I thought the movie found its footing a little bit more, and actually became funny at times. Early on though, wasn't enjoying it all that much.

Definitely not enough Sibelle Hu in this movie. (by Daxtreme of KFF)

**Ghoul Sex Squad (Hong Kong, 1991: Ma Wu-Tu)** - The main reason why I've covered so few Hong Kong movies, even in genres that interest me more than crime and martial arts, is that I know almost nothing about them. Their history, their conventions, the workings of the industry that produces them— it's all one gigantic blank for the most part, and because I like to inform as well as entertain if at all possible, I feel like I ought to fill in some of that blank before trying to write about the films that spring from it. I have few compunctions about looking like an ill-informed idiot where *Ghoul Sex Squad* is concerned, however. So far as I can tell, nobody knows much of anything about this movie, so in flaunting my ignorance, I'm doing no worse than any of those few who have made some attempt to discuss it before me.

One of the few things I have learned about Hong Kong cinema is that the Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority (roughly analogous to the British Board of Film Classification, except that it obviously has jurisdiction over TV in addition to movies and home video) classifies films into "categories" based upon their content, and that the most restrictive of these groupings has the force of law. Category I is more or less equivalent to the Motion Picture Association of America's G-rating, although it's unclear to me whether that equivalency comes closer to the relatively permissive G of the 60's and 70's, or to today's more rigid interpretation. Categories II and IIb are for films that the TELA deems unsuitable for children and "young people" respectively. They seem to approximate PG-13 and R in American usage, though again the details of what passes muster under each fall outside my limited knowledge. Category III is the adults-only rating, and the one that has attracted the most attention in the English-speaking world— not least, perhaps, because of all the ways in which it's almost like our various X, R, 18, and NC-17 certifications, but not quite. In the frequency with which the TELA employs it, the best analogy is probably to the old British X-certificate, and that similarity is further underscored by the apparent use of Cat-III classification to flag movies as belonging to certain genres. The TELA's standing as an official government agency also places Category III's significance closer to that of a British X or 18 (or an Australian R) than to an American X or NC-17. However, adults-only movies in Hong Kong don't have the same stigma attached to them as they do in Britain or the United States, and in that sense, Category III functions like what the MPAA originally envisioned for its X and NC-17. Films bearing the restrictive rating do not face the kinds of distribution and advertising penalties that have nearly always dogged their British and American equivalents, and consignment to Category III by itself is no obstacle to mainstream success. Nor have the creators or stars of Cat-III movies generally found it difficult to move beyond that milieu, at least no more so than can be attributed to plain old type-casting. The clearest indication of Category III's social acceptability is that of raw numbers— approximately half of the movies released in Hong Kong during the early 90's carried the rating. That lack of condemnation is especially interesting from a Western perspective, for the content of Hong Kong's adults-only films frequently is not socially acceptable at all by our cultural standards. Category III is where you'll find the Skinemax softcore sex flicks (*The Fruit Is Swelling, Sex and Zen*), the lurid "true" crime extrapolations (*Human Pork Buns: The Untold Story, There's a Secret in My Soup*), the noxiously misogynistic rape-and-torture pictures that even grindhouse diehards often find indefensible (*Love to Kill, Chinese Torture Chamber Story*). And as I'm sure you've guessed by now, it's also where you'll find Mah Wu Tu's hardcore porno

period-piece horror-comedy, *Ghoul Sex Squad*, a film which the phrase “fucking bizarre” describes with all-too-literal accuracy.

Out in the woods somewhere, a Taoist priest calls out, “Assemble!” summoning his quintet of vampires... and I’m going to have to go off on a second long explanatory tangent already, aren’t I? Okay— Chinese vampires are a little different from the ones you’ll find haunting Transylvanian castles or, more recently, hanging out in dank nightclubs dressed like gay pirates and listening to really shitty industrial music. In some respects, they’re actually more like zombies— susceptible to control by priests and magicians, nearly mindless on their own, and poorly coordinated due to the decay of their bodies. Their skins are greenish and fuzzy with mold, and they are so ravaged by rigor mortis that they can’t even walk normally, hopping stiffly about instead. In fact, the Chinese term for them (jiang shi in Mandarin, geung si in Cantonese) literally means “stiff corpse.” They’re also usually blind, and must track their prey by the smell of its breath. And interestingly enough, there’s some indication that blood-drinking did not become the jiang shi’s normal method of draining the life force from its victims until the 19th century, when the Chinese got a chance to compare notes on the mechanics of vampirism with the European colonists who were such pains in their asses in those days. As for how one becomes a jiang shi, it’s most commonly the result of a ritually incorrect burial. If I understand correctly, Chinese folk belief has it that the soul splits into its yin and yang energies upon death, with the intellectual yang soul proceeding into the underworld while the sensitive yin remains tied to the body. With no yang around to balance things, the yin spirit has all the emotional control of a hyperactive three-year-old, and it tends to get pissed off about things like being buried on an unpropitious date or having the feng shui of its gravesite fall out of whack. When that happens, the resentful spirit climbs back into the body and hops off to vent its ire upon anyone unlucky enough to be handy. A variety of Taoist rituals can contain, control, or destroy the vampire, but you’re going to need a priest if you want them done right.

Anyway, we have a priest with a pack of vampires under his command, and he’s marching them across the countryside for who knows what reason. Eventually, he gets tired of smelling his undead minions, and orders them into the river they’ve been following to wash the crud of decay from their bodies. One of the vampires— Number Three— sneaks disobediently away, however, and when the priest goes to see what’s what, he discovers something that he’d missed before. Number Three is a girl, and apparently shyness about nudity counts as one of the emotions that a vampire is unable to restrain. One rather wonders how the priest failed to notice the difference until now, because Number Three is not only very obviously female, but also extremely cute if you don’t mind a little skin-rot. Evidently the priest doesn’t mind skin-rot at all, because the very next thing he does is to peel off the vampire’s robes and fuck her. Fortunately for all of us, the makeup guys on the *Ghoul Sex Squad* set were just as lazy as the ones who worked on *Zombie Lake*, and Number Three isn’t decayed at all from the neck down.

Meanwhile, in a tavern not far away, an old man with a ludicrous, hooting voice is telling ghost stories to the other customers, but one man has no patience for such entertainment. He loudly proclaims that there are no such things as ghosts or demons or vampires, but the storyteller counters that he’ll start believing once he sees for himself. Naturally, that means the scoffer is about to have a run-in with the priest and his geung si. It starts when the man from the tavern catches sight of the vampires hopping in single file through the woods, and curiosity gets the better of him. He follows the pack to the priest’s hideout, just in time to arrive on the scene after the priest himself has set out in search of a refill for his wine jug. All the vampires have been immobilized with spell-scrolls fastened to their foreheads when Mr. I-Ain’t-Afraid-of-No-Ghosts sneaks into the lair, but that’s no fun, is it? Beside, how’s a guy to know whether a vampire’s really real if all it’s doing is standing around motionless? Our fearless skeptic promptly earns himself a Darwin Award by removing the charms from the heads of all the vampires and clamorously ringing the bell that awakens them.

As for the priest, he goes not to the tavern for his wine, but to the first house he sees with a light on inside. On the way there, he passes by a young woman leading a young man off for a tryst at the local temple, but that’s a different subplot. It does, however, happen that she lives at the very house where the priest hopes to procure his wine, apparently as the daughter-in-law of the old woman who owns the place. The latter holds a very low opinion of her son’s wife, but again, that’s a different subplot. There’s also a just-plain-daughter in the house, although “plain” is hardly an appropriate adjective to apply to her. This younger girl is understandably taken aback when a strange priest breezes into the house, asking for wine and claiming that the door was open, and her mom catches on very quickly that the visitor is the vampire-master whom people have apparently been talking about lately. The remarkably lousy English subtitles on the print I saw have Mom telling her daughter to “ask him out,” presumably the intended sense here is “give him his wine and make him leave,” but what the girl actually does is, well, to ask him out. Or in, rather. As soon as her mother is out of earshot, she takes the priest to bed, and we all start pondering what kind of hellish VD you can get from having unprotected sex with a guy who fucks the living dead.



By this time, the skeptic from the inn has fully reaped the rewards of his foolishness— the vampires have awakened, attacked him, and made him one of their own. They get restless after a while with no instructions from the priest to follow, and eventually fan out into the countryside to cause trouble. Some of them head for the temple, where they waylay the sister-in-law's under-the-table boyfriend while he takes a post-coital leak in the surrounding woods (shades of Andreas Schnaas!). Number Five goes to the house, conveniently arriving after his master has departed, and spies on the daughter while she takes a bath. (I guess some geung si aren't blind after all...) The most fearsome-looking of the bunch (Number Two, maybe? Except for Three and Five, they're a little hard to tell apart) enters the temple itself, and has his way with the adulteress. (How to tell good girls from bad, the Cat-III way: when the old lady's daughter discovers her undead peeping tom, she throws a hissy fit that scares the vampire away; her sister-in-law, on the other hand, decides to just roll with it when she wakes up with a dead man's cock in her mouth.) The rest make their way to the tavern, where they cause a panic worthy of a Three Stooges short. It's up to the priest (once he realizes what happened while he was out) to round up all the geung si again before they can do too much damage, a process that will depend about equally on Taoist magic and kung fu.

If I had to pass judgement on *Ghoul Sex Squad* in one sentence, I'd say that it's agonizingly dull, except when it's bugshit loony and awesome. Unfortunately, agonizingly dull has a decisive upper hand. There's a certain novelty in seeing hardcore smut combined with so many other, seemingly incompatible things, but Mah Wu Tu's technique here owes more to American models than European, and my regular readers will know by now how dismal I find most US porn. The sex scenes would serve their purpose just as well if they were trimmed to half their present length, while the vampires' rampage could really use another ten or fifteen minutes devoted to it. On the other hand, it isn't as though Mah shows much more sense of pace when he's pointing the camera at something other than a rutting couple. Witness the opening march of the vampires, which goes on and on with a temporal incontinence that I usually associate more with climactic fight scenes. In the end, *Ghoul Sex Squad* is one of those films that are far more interesting in concept than they are in practice, but paradoxically, it owes most of that conceptual interest to the very thing that makes it so close to worthless when you're actually watching. After all, how often do you see non-simulated sex in Cantonese cinema? The sole other hardcore sex film I've ever heard of from Hong Kong was made by the same director as *Ghoul Sex Squad*— it's called *Mind Fuck*, and by all accounts, it earns its title and then some while being just as disappointingly boring as this movie. As I said before, I'm hardly an expert on the subject, but I've talked to people who are much better informed than I am, and they all expressed astonishment at *Ghoul Sex Squad's* existence, too. I note that not one of them said anything about wanting to see it, though. (by Scott Ashlin)

**God of Gamblers (Hong Kong, 1989: Wong Jing)** - "God of Gamblers is a stylistic hodge-podge with a few astonishingly excellent elements and a bravura ending that lands it solidly in the "recommended" column. Wong Jing shows a surprising amount of restraint (for him) at some points and goes over the deep end in others—but also shows that he is an most accomplished craftsman with capabilities much greater than he often cares to show.

As Ko Chun Chow Yun Fat is so cool that he makes James Bond look like a screaming hysteric. Chow's appearance in the first part of the movie was a satirical comment on his characters in other films, even though that might not have been Wong's intention. His hair could not have been more slicked back—the hair gel line in the production budget must have been quite a number. Chun's relaxed grin never left his face even while gambling for the highest stakes and is concentration never wavered. The only indication that he was thinking about the game at all was when he would cock an eyebrow or touch his jade ring. And he did everything but file his nails while Mr. Dragon beat up thugs on the train. He matched the beautiful and alarmingly tattooed—a most memorable image-- Michiko Nishiwaki move for move while throwing dice.

Wong occasionally references other movies—and seems to do so with no concern for plot, theme or character. The most obvious example is toward the end of the gunfight that begins in a deserted car park when a young mother loses control of her baby carriage and it bumps down the moving steps of an escalator. This is, of course, one of the most iconic images in all film and has been since 1925 when Sergei Eisenstein used it in "Battleship Potemkin". Directors repeat it at their peril—most memorably of recent vintage was Brian De Palma in "The Untouchables"—since it becomes an image that many will recognize and comment upon. Comparing oneself to the Russian silent film master might be a sign of hubris. And if there was ever a hubristic filmmaker, it is Wong Jing. During the same sequence he also quotes from "Carlito's Way", another De Palma film, when Dragon lies on the moving escalator and fires at the villains standing above him on the stairs. The baby carriage image only works if it is one of the centers of the action and also if it shows either the complete bestiality of the bad guys or the nobility of the good guys. Here it doesn't really do either—thrown into the mix.

On the other hand there are scenes in “God of Gamblers” that are as competent and, in their own way, thrilling, as anything ever put on film. The meeting between the villainous Yee (Jimmy Lung Fong) and Ko Chun in the hospital after Chun recovers his memory is one of them. There is a close up of the two of them which lasts almost three minutes—2 minutes and 57 seconds on the DVD I watched—with no cuts. This is an incredibly long time for a camera to not look away from anything but Wong is doing much more here than showing off. This scene brings begins the last act of the movie. It ties up everything that has happened before and makes sure that the audience knows where each character stands—who is the good guy, who is the bad guy, who can remember what. It perfectly sets the scene for the climatic action to come. Wong shows a tremendous amount of trust in his actors—no matter how much coverage he may have shot—in this one shot. Fong and Chow repay that trust beautifully.

There are plenty of other sequences, however, that should have been edited with a much heavier hand. The transition sequence with the four new friends—Chun, Knife, Crawl and Jane—bouncing around the city to the treacly strains of “Raindrops Keep Falling on my Head” was much too long—a couple of short scenes would have been adequate and more importantly, tolerable, especially if it didn’t include music cribbed from one of the most well known scenes from one of the most popular movies ever produced in Hollywood. Chun’s fall through the bobby-trapped fence was especially badly done—the fence began to collapse into the ravine before Chun began to lean on it. Chow Yun Fat almost had to jump to keep up with the falling prop. And Knife’s assault on the concussed and helpless Chun was a real low point—Paris Hilton could have delivered more convincing punches and kicks.

Andy Lau did as well as anyone could in the thankless role of Knife. Knife was bad, but not that bad. He was tough, but not really that tough. From the evidence in the movie the character was probably in his mid-20s. It was impossible to feel empathy with him, even during the obligatory scene when is angry with Chun and abandons him in a busy street, only to run back to help him when he rediscovers his humanity while watching a mother brutalize her young son. Lau is one of the irreplaceable actors in Hong Kong cinema over the past 20 years—very talented, able to inhabit many different roles and sell them to the audience. But making us care about Knife was beyond even him.

Chow, of course, was perfect as the God of Gamblers and did a decent job as the brain damaged Ko Chun. During the gunfight in the garage he was very convincing as a fearful and horrified innocent who simply wanted to hide from the violence that was suddenly blazing around him. This made his transition, the one we had been waiting for, all the more forceful and impressive. After being hit on the head yet again the cowering, sniveling Ko Chun was suddenly the second coming of Mark Gor, righteously dealing death from the 9 MM pistols held in each hand. As is generally the case there was an almost inexhaustible supply of minor villains to be dispatched and a limitless amount of ammunition with which to send them to the next world.

The gorgeous Joey Wong was mainly decorative and was variously costumed in torn jeans—really torn jeans—corset like tops and very short skirts. Dramatically she was the conscience for Knife and his even more ineffectual underling Crawl and, with the aged Granny, served as the token non-criminals in the story.

The ending of the movie, while not surprising, was very well done with plenty of suspense as to exactly how the God of Gamblers was going to reassert himself. The shots of the cards sliding across the green baize, the extreme close ups of Chun’s winning hand and the perfectly executed set-up of the traitorous Yee and the disgusting Mr. Chang could not have been done much better. It brought the story full circle and put everything to rights. (by Ewaffle of HKMDB)

**God of Gamblers 2 (Hong Kong, 1990: Wong Jing)** - Ko Chun’s good friend, Little Knife (Lau) has had a year to learn the art of gambling from his mentor and is now making a name for himself as the “Knight of Gamblers”. Sadly, under the terms of his teaching he is only able to keep 5% of all that he wins and must donate the remainder to charity. When Sing (Chow) appears on his doorstep claiming to have mystical powers, he sees a chance to use this hapless idiot for his own gain. However, they both have bigger problems in the form of the foster son of Mr. Chan (the original foe of the God Of Gamblers) who vows revenge and ruin the reputation of the God Of Gamblers. It’s up to Knife and Sing to make sure that their gambling credentials remains intact.

Andy Lau was the only major star to return for this sequel to 1989’s ‘God Of Gamblers’, and coincidentally he is about the only real connection to its predecessor. Aside from a few vague rumblings about Ko Chun, the main focus is on the comedic elements, with Stephen Chow bought on board to recreate his performance from ‘All For The Winner’. Sadly the story isn’t really up to the challenge, and the film feels like little more than a cheap repetition of the original with added Wong Jing silliness. Chow and Lau try their best and have a decent chemistry, but they don’t really have much to work with and the film is rarely as fun as it could have been.

The gambling scenes are back in full force and, at least as this point in the franchise, still retain a fairly naive charm. There's also a few fight scenes on offer, though most of them are over before you know it. That said, there is one highly amusing sequence where Stephen Chow fights with plunger nunchuks as well as a few flashes of Charles Heung that are suitably stylish.

With lazy writing and weak comedy, 'God Of Gamblers II' often feels like little more than a typical Wong Jing cash grab. Luckily for him, the stellar cast elevate it above his usual standards and just about save it from being a total waste of time. (by Phil Mills of Far East Films)

**God of Gamblers III: Back to Shanghai (Hong Kong, 1991: Wong Jing)** - The best of the Stephen Chow/Wong Jing do hap collaborations, *God of Gamblers 3* manages to compact Chow's trademark mo lei tau wordplay into a package boasting exciting action, a jovial cast, Back to the Future-style time travel predicaments, and hilarious physical comedy. However, knowledge of the storyline to the legendary Shanghai Beach (aka The Bund) TV series is required in order to get a lot of the jokes (most notably the casting of Ray Lui as Ding Lik, the same character he portrayed in the television series). Despite this obstacle, there is plenty on hand to enjoy in this entertaining production. Most significant is the presence of Mainland Chinese actress Gong Li, who turns in an uncharacteristically comedic performance as a pair of twin sisters. She and Chow have wonderful on-screen chemistry, and the two would reunite later on for Chow's 1993 vehicle, *Flirting Scholar*. In addition, the occasional fight sequences are well choreographed, the gambling scenes are ingenious, and there is a joyfully infectious musical number (dedicated to steamed buns, with the world's first McDonald's serving as the backdrop (?)). Very much recommended. (by Vic Nguyen of City on Fire)

**God of Gamblers 3: The Early Stage (Hong Kong, 1996: Wong Jing)** - Wong Jing does it again! Another great entry in the *God of Gamblers* series. You'd think this one has no chance since it replaces the incredibly charismatic Chow Yun-Fat with the incredibly plain Leon Lai. But the star of this movie is the ingenious gambling scenarios and slick action sequences --- two things at which Wong Jing excels, and Leon Lai is smart enough to stay out of the way. It doesn't hurt that Jordan Chan is wholly believable as the principled fighting master of very few words, Lone Ng (Charles Heung's "God of Guns" character from the earlier films). As with all films in this series, plot elements are just thrown at you randomly, and then everything comes together in a climactic gambling sequence which will have you trying to guess the outcome in futility. It seems there are two types of Wong Jing films: those which he lets his grunts direct just to make a quick buck, and those in which he invests his great talent to produce a genuinely creative movie. Fortunately, it seems that the God of Gamblers series is near and dear to his heart. (by jfierro of HKMDB)

**God of Gamblers' Return (Hong Kong, 1994: Wong Jing)** - It should probably be mentioned right up front that this Hong Kong production is directed by Wong Jing. We actually really like every Wong Jing film we've ever seen (including *City Hunter*, *God of Gamblers*, *Last Hero in China*, and *High Risk*), but some books and other collections of criticism make Wong out to be a talentless hack. Certainly no one is ever going to mistake any of Wong's films for great pieces of art. He doesn't craft brutally intense or fiercely personal meditations on violence like John Woo or Ringo Lam. It seems unlikely that he will ever make the transition to Hollywood, because his films are so rooted in HK conventions. His films are wildly popular among the audience they are intended for, though, and that's probably enough.

That being said, *God of Gamblers' Return* is an excellent example of a Wong Jing film and what we like about Wong Jing's films. It is colorful, it features lots of stars, it has just a touch of pathos, and the action scenes are exciting.

For those unfamiliar with the first God of Gamblers, Chow Yun Fat plays Ko Chun, the titular character. He is such a good gambler, we're not really sure if what he does can really be called gambling. He seems to have an almost magical ability to get the card he wants, and he seems to be able to bend almost any game of chance to his will. In the first movie Ko accidentally takes a series of bloody blows to the head (played for laughs!) and loses his memory and most of his reasoning ability. He is then befriended by the roguish Dagger Chan (Andy Lau) who uses Ko's autistic gambling abilities to win money. Yep, it's a Rain Man rip-off. In any case, while Ko is out of it and presumed dead, a guy who works for Ko kills Ko's girlfriend (the less said about this, the better) and tries to steal Ko's considerable fortune. Luckily, Ko gets his memory back in time for the climactic gambling match. Then Ko has to deal with an opponent who has figured out his poker strategy and a traitor on his own staff.

There were several sequels to *God of Gamblers* before *God of Gamblers' Return*, but none of them actually featured Chow Yun Fat. When *God of Gamblers' Return* opens, Ko has settled down in France with his new wife, who looks just like his dead girlfriend (the same actress playing a different character). She's pregnant with their first child. Then, they live happily ever after. Ha! Just kidding! This is a Hong Kong action film, and no one lives happily ever after. Chau (Wu Hsin-kuo), also known as the Devil of Gamblers, shows up at Ko's estate looking for a match or something, but Ko's not there. For reasons that are never explained, he instead kills Ko's wife and leaves Ko's unborn son in a jar on a table. Ko gets back in time to have shoot-out with some of the Devil's men and hear his wife's last words: She wants him to promise not to gamble or answer to the name God of Gamblers for one year. Why a year? Who knows? Why no gambling? Who knows? Why a duck? Because horses don't have feathers.

Now that a totally pointless limitation has been put Ko, the movie jumps ahead 11 and one half months. Ko is traveling around incognito. (No, Incognito isn't a place in China...) He befriends a Taiwanese tycoon, who is promptly blown up by the Devil's goons. Ko promises the dying tycoon that he will take the tycoon's son (kung fu prodigy Xie Miao) back to Taiwan so he can be with his sister. First this means escaping from mainland China, because everyone was on the tycoon's yacht when it was blown up, and it was off the coast of China. Ko escapes to Taiwan safely, along with the son and three stragglers: a Chinese police official and a brother and sister con artist team who go by the names Little Trumpet (Tony Leung) and Little Guitar (Jacquelin Wu).

Once back in Taiwan, Ko turns the little tike over to his sister (Chingmy Yau). Then Chau kidnaps the little kid, and the sister challenges Chau to a gambling duel. Chau reveals that he did all this in an attempt to smoke out the God of Gamblers, and he reveals that he thinks Ko is the aforementioned God. "I watched a painting in France," the subtitles inform us, referring to Ko's self portrait back at the mansion at the beginning of the movie, and the fact that the God of Gamblers never lets his photograph be taken (Odd, because later in this movie Ko clearly lets his photo be taken). Ko laughs in Chau's face, and because there are still two more days until his wife's deadline expires, he pretends to be Dagger Chan (Andy Lau's character from the previous movie) and Little Trumpet pretends to be Ko Chun. What follows is a mistaken identity plot so typical of HK films, but everything is worked out in time for Ko to meet Chau at Chau's secret casino in a high stakes poker match. How high are the stakes? \$16,000,000,000 US and some assorted body parts. Can Ko avenge the deaths of all the family members, friends, acquaintances and passers-by that Chau has killed so far in the movie? Especially considering that Chau has an ace up his sleeve in the form of psychic villain (Wong Kam-kong) who can change Ko's cards through teleportation? You'll just have to watch it and see.

As is the case with nearly any movie he's in, Chow Yun Fat is the best thing in this film. Here we get to see the two modes of Chow. At the beginning and the end of the film we see Cool Chow, with his hair slicked back and his slightly pudgy frame clad in impeccably tailored suits and tuxedos. For most of the body of the movie we get Ragamuffin Chow, with his hair unkempt (but perfectly so) and his wardrobe reduced to T-shirts and jeans. We also get a bonus mode of Chow, in that he spends some of the movie impersonating Andy Lau, but this really comes off as slightly more hyperactive version of Ragamuffin Chow.

As with most Wong Jing films, the rest of the cast is all star. Tony Leung (not the one from *Hard Boiled*) lends his goofy comedy skills to the second half of the movie. A couple standout for sheer stupidity, like a scene where Little Trumpet pretends to be Jet Li in *Once Upon a Time in China 2*, or another scene where he disguises himself as a clock. Bonnie Fu, who was in *Full Contact*, has a small part. Xie Miao, who was previously in *New Legends of Shaolin*, seems to making his bid to be the Macaulay Culkin of Asia. And Chingmy Yau, who is in most Wong Jing films, has a large part in the movie and a wardrobe made up almost entirely low cut dresses. Woo hoo!

We would be lying if we were to say that much of this movie makes sense. The plot careens around wildly, changing direction at the fall of a hat. A couple of plot developments, like Ko's wife's dying wish, seem totally contrived. And there is a high factor of coincidence at work, like when Ko befriends a tycoon who just happens to have crossed the same man who killed Ko's wife. Other times, plot developments take place in a vacuum, like Little Guitar's touching death scene with Ko. In the next scene, you would be hard pressed to tell if Little Trumpet has even noticed that his sister died the day before.

Total disregard for plot logic is pretty common in HK action-comedies, so you really can't let it get to you. What may be even more disconcerting to some viewers are the wild variations in tone from scene to scene. Sometimes the films seems to be a slapstick comedy, sometimes a love story, sometimes a farce, and sometimes an action film. It's kind of like what Mark Twain said about New England weather; If you don't like what you got, wait fifteen minutes and it will change. It would be difficult, however, to find any given fifteen minute stretch in the middle of this movie where it displays any kind of consistent tone. Don't like the love story between Ko and Little Guitar? Wait 2 minutes, and a wacky chase will erupt among the narrow alleys China. Don't like the boring interaction between Ko, the

tycoon and the tike? No fear, because in three minutes Ko will be underwater, fighting for his life James Bond style. You can be guaranteed that every few minutes something entertaining will happen.

What is consistent is that this is a very slick production. The camera work is always good, everything appears very colorful, and the action scenes are exciting, about one part martial arts, one part James Bond, and two parts gun play. And the galaxy of stars all look their best. Under Wong Jing the whole movie is fun. Goofy, pointless, fluffy fun, but fun nevertheless. And we wouldn't have it any other way. (by Scott Hamilton and Chris Holland of Stomp Tokyo)

**Godfather's Daughter Mafia Blues (Hong Kong, 1991: Fung Hak-On)** - Not really one for fight fans. Despite having incredible martial arts talent on board, it surprisingly lacks in the action department. A shame really since the choreography is this amazing blend of old school shapes and modern kickboxing. It's really something.

Poor old Benny Lai. Dude never got his chance to shine and, once again, he shows he's an incredible martial artist in this one. He just gets very little to do. The film picks up in the last fifteen minutes but it's not all that impressive. It's fine; don't get me wrong. It's just not what it should be with the likes of Yukari Oshima, Fung Hal On and Ken Lo. (by Drunken Monk of KFF)

**Golden Nightmare (Hong Kong, 1998: Lo Po-Shan)** - Shiochi, son of the Japanese war criminal Okawa, goes in search of stolen Chinese antiquities his father buried in the Philippines during World War II. Annie Wu plays Wang Chin, a Mainland Chinese police officer who heads a mission to the Philippines to recover the treasure and arrest Okawa. This mission is assisted by a map and local Philippino police. The team includes Max Mok, who plays Li, a Chinese professor of antiquities (and martial artist!), with Yukari as his assistant Jean Chung. Chin and Okawa's rival forces have a series of face-offs in the jungle, culminating in destruction of Okawa's group and recovery of the treasure. The Japanese are definitely vilified in the plot that includes a flashback to a prisoner massacre. A good cast, crisp editing and above-average production values enhance this action movie. Pace and plot development are competent, and fight scenes are well executed. The climax includes a series of one-to-one fights between familiar HK and Philippino action stars - looking older but still impressive. Yukari appears pale, drawn and tired. Her character is depicted with a sprained ankle, but performs her two fight scenes without doubling. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Good, the Bad, and the Beauty, The (Hong Kong, 1988: Frankie Chan)** - This is a wacky little film that I enjoyed more than I really should have. Watching it is like being on a genre seesaw as it switches constantly back and forth between screwball comedy and violent action. One second you are laughing at some silly bit and the next moment someone's blood is splattered against the walls. Somehow though it barely manages to hang together and be entertaining - due primarily to the charming interaction between Cherie Chung and Kent Cheng - while Frankie Chan (who also directed and produced) rides along as the straight man and performs much of the action.

The very opening scene is an example of this genre seesaw. Kent is walking along with a few bags of groceries when he spots a sweet little girl crying. When he asks her why - she points up to her kitty trapped in a tree and so Kent shimmies up the tree to save the cat. When he looks back down the little girl is scooting off as fast as she can with his groceries - and then an old crone spots him in the tree and starts shouting to the neighbors that he is a peeping tom. Finally she shoots him out of the tree with a slingshot - he falls onto a wagon that immediately starts flying down the hill. Just as Kent is about to crash into a taxi, his cop partner Frankie opens the door and Kent goes flying softly into the cab. Then before a breath can be taken a group of bad guys come running out of a store that they just robbed and both Frankie and Kent have a wild shootout and chase through the streets of HK ending with blood splattered all over an elevator wall. If ever you want to paint your walls red - ask Frankie to shoot a movie in your apartment. There were at least three other scenes that left large stains on the walls!

The main plot revolves around Cherie who as an airline stewardess has smuggled some valuable diamonds into HK - but now wants to keep them herself. The triad boss clearly isn't happy with this and tries to kill her - while Frankie and Kent try their best to protect her. This leads to a number of action scenes and some goofy comedy between Kent - who is understandably infatuated with Cherie - and Cherie who just wants to get rich but is only to happy to lead him on when it suits her.

Cherie seems to have the time of her life with this role as she goes from giddy to crazy to conniving at the drop of a hat or two. It is really a funny performance and if she is a favorite of yours I would recommend this film to you. It is

amazing when you think of the different roles she played during her shortish career – the chic cat burglar in *Once a Thief*, the earthy country girl in *Wild Search*, the nutty sex maniac in *Eight Happiness*, the sweet and larcenous musician in *Peking Opera Blues* and the newly arrived immigrant in the wonderfully romantic *An Autumn's Tale*.

There was one scene that cracked me up of Cherie running through the streets of HK with forty Filipinas in close pursuit. If you have ever been to HK you probably noticed that on Sundays the parks are filled with Filipino maids on their day off. I have no doubt that someone came up to them and asked them if they wanted to be in a movie and they all said yes! And the next moment they are running after Cherie with smiles not quite being able to be contained. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Gorgeous (Hong Kong, 1999: Vincent Kok)** - 1999 lightweight, meandering and long romance comedy about a ditzzy innocent Taiwanese girl (Shu Qi) who eventually becomes involved with a mega-wealthy HK executive (Jackie). Within this otherwise forgettable affair (which contains only little Jackie stunt fun) are two jaw-dropping, very long, mano vs. mano and serious kickboxing scenes pitting Jackie against Bradley James Allen (who also co-starred in *Gen X Cops*)---arguably some of the best stuff ever filmed. Allen shows Bruce Lee-like lightning quickness and Lee-like wide spectrum of technique with notable elements from tae kwon do, capoeira, some wu shu. The guy is simply tremendous. He moves at warp speed, and it is only minimally undercranked/enhanced.

Jackie, meanwhile, shows off his own best physical moves since *Drunken Master II*, using a similar recipe as Allen, but he is no match for Allen. For the sake of the story, Jackie finds an amusing way to prevail. As it has been throughout Chan's movie fight career vs. clearly superior enemies (Benny Urquidez, Hwang Jang Lee, Bill Wallace, etc.) it is not entirely convincing. In any case, Jackie must be applauded for these two tremendous sequences, which should be analyzed and debated by all MA film fans, over and over. He deserves kudos for putting himself through what must have been a grueling training regimen to go against Allen at his now-ripe age. (by the Martial Artist's Guide to Hong Kong Films)

**Green Hornet, The (Hong Kong, 1994: Lam Ching-Ying)** - Chin Kar Lok plays The Green Hornet, who must keep his identity hidden even though he begins to love a woman.

First scene is kind of a show off part where Chin Kar Lok beats some guys around, a few of his kicks are great, very springy and he chains them well. Lam directed the action scenes I'm sure, they're very clean and have excellent editing and camerawork, and whatever that boomerang Chin uses, it's pretty convincing. Very dark though, it's visible on screen but not in captures so I can't prove his kicks.

Next scene isn't that long, it takes place at a dock and Chin fights off another batch of guys. A group of about 8 men wearing hard hats runs at him and he swipes them with kicks, all of the kicks are good of course. Each man gets about one hit in, but Chin works in style. Very nice again.

There's another scene at a another dock where Chin fights off another crowd, in the beginning it's some romance stuff, ... yea it goes on for a while, the lady takes pictures, swings around on a rope with him, but after that he does a rush on about 8 people, takes them all out, and it's done, again. Some wirework, but it's horizontal, heheheh.

Ok, the reason to buy this movie is the fight between Yu Rong Guang and Chin Kar Lok. Yu plays the cool cop, staying true to his character, very calm and waiting for Chin to do something cool. He fight so well with Chin, who throws most of the moves, while Yu maintains his style, when he blocks he just walks back a little, so cool. First CHIN throws kicks at him madly, Yu tells him he doesn't have time for games, and he hasn't even started, but then he takes his jacket off. Then things get fast, lots of good fighting, handwork, great kicks, joint locking, ground stuff, it all goes in here. Yu is doubled for stuff, but I don't imagine it's that he couldn't do it, maybe he was gone, besides this place looks like a set and I believe some was filmed at night too, who knows. Yu does some joint locks and VERY good kicks, unusual for him now. And towards the end they have a GREAT punching cut with 12 or so hits, almost wing chun in nature but better. Done, but I kind of knew that the best was done with, Yu never fights again in this movie. This one isn't blazing fast in terms of structure, they're basically squaring off, but all the action in it is fast, and it's not interrupted TOO often. But if you like Yu, buy the movie just for this fight, so nicely done.

Chin gets a little drugged and goes up against a gwailo, but begins to lose miserably. He is beaten around by a white guy, who I didn't like much, and Chin accidentally dumps biohazard material on his head (that's what you do when you're drugged), and not much happens, the other guy isn't too good looking here. Chin takes some rough falls, a nice HK spin, falling onto a barrell, etc.

But in the next and final scene, Chin gets back at the bad man by tossing him around with more style. The bad guy kicks, Chin kicks his leg. Punches, kicks his leg again. And the bad guy is doubled too, falls and such are done by an HK dude. Chin ties him up in a tree and that's the end of him. After that, we get a terrible excuse for a finale with Chin shooting people. Why Lam did this I don't know.

A surprisingly bad ending really. The fight against the one guy at the end was ok, but I expected some 1 on 1, not just 1 on. And then Lam's directing went down the hole, we went tasteless and just had guns, like he was getting tired of the movie and wanted to get it done. However, the other fights, especially the one against Yu but excluding the one where Chin is drugged are great. I had no idea what to expect from this, I had seen 2 pictures of it and didn't think the fight against Yu would be so long nor so good, so I was impressed there. However there is no good end fight, so when you're done with the first disc (half) of the movie,... well, I don't want to ruin it for you too much, the scene is cool where he whails on the bad guy, but there is no END FIGHT. And no other fights in the second half worthwhile anyways. So, bad structure. Had Lam put the fight against Yu at the end, it would have been awesome, but no he did it early on, probably expecting a worthwhile villain who just came in half way through the movie, so I can't blame him entirely. The gwaio was terrible and couldn't perform, so I blame that dude. But Lam could have found someone else.

So, in conclusion, Chin was great, Yu was awesome, the group fights were pretty cool, but there wasn't much one on one action. That's not Green Hornet's style though, so his group fights were cool enough. There just wasn't much. Oh and no, Lam does not fight in this, his character is just a supporting role. If I were him, I would have put on a mask and played the villain and given Chin a good end fight. So for the editing, choreography, and camerawork in the good fights, plus that amazing fight against Yu, I give it a 3.5/5 - But for die-hard Yu fans like myself, 4/5, you'll flip at that one fight. (by Eric Jacobus of the Stunt People)

**Guard Soldier (Taiwan, 2000: Wu Kuo-Hsiao)** - "Guard Soldier" has all the attributes one generally associates with Taiwan movies shot on video—wooden acting, dull costumes, sets that look like (and probably are) hotel rooms, private homes and office building lobbies guns that throw sparks when fired but have no recoil and a barely there plot. It is watchable, at least for me, because it stars Cynthia Khan, an actress who seems to have missed out on stardom for reasons that are far from apparent. She is by far the best thing—perhaps the only really positive thing--about this movie. Expressive face, large eyes, full but natural looking lips, very convincing as someone who can kick ass and take names.

The plot, such as it is, centers on the connection between small arms dealing and shoddy construction practices in an earthquake zone. President Day is the bad guy—all the other hoodlums take orders from him. Conflict is epitomized in Jei, an honest engineer for one of Day's companies who refuses to sign off on construction using substandard concrete. In order to convince him to do so Day has his lawyer and his chief thug kidnap his son. When that doesn't quite work he sends a platoon of hitmen after the family, killing Mei (Jei's wife) and their son and injuring the engineer.

Bittersweet romance—Jei and Mary (Cynthia Khan) were lovers years before and she turned down a chance to go to the States with him. Mary is now leading the investigation into President Day so they are thrown together once again. Sparks do not ignite.

Gunfights break out every ten minutes or so. Most of them involve Sir Ma the half insane henchman of President Day. One example of the ineptitude with which "Guard Soldier" was shot and edited takes place after a shootout between Ma and his cohorts and a gang who wants a small piece of the action. Everyone but Ma and the other gang leader are killed during the first volley, leaving the two of them stalking each other around a huge pillar. This could have been an exciting or at least interesting as Ma closed in for the kill but any drama was squeezed out of the scene by the sloppy framing and unimaginative camera work.

Cynthia does dispatch a few bad guys using punches and kicks, vaults over a couple of fences and dodges some hand grenades. She is fast and fit and moves with an easy grace. It is unfortunate that her career was full of dreck like this.

Outtakes are shown under the closing credits—the director could have included this footage in the movie without losing much.

Recommended for those (like me) who want to see everything with Ms. Khan. (by Ewaffle of HKMDB)

**Guardian Angel (Taiwan, 1994/1996: Philip Ko Fei) - aka Sexual Harasser** - Rosa, Candy and Lisa are police officers trained to assassinate drug smugglers in this cheaply made montage of nondescript action scenes, soft core pornography, plus some footage from "Hard To Kill" as well as what appear to be some scenes from "Fatal Chase." Yukari has only the briefest of fight scenes - barely worthy of the name - plus some comic interaction with the Philippino police. The girlfriend of one of the officers (Rosa) is almost killed in a revenge shooting. She is saved, but an implanted brain chip places her under the control of her ruthless boss Chan. Rosa is sent to Taiwan, and several soft-core scenes follow - alternating with killings of a series of drug traffickers. Dick Wei appears in a brief cameo as one of the villains. Yukari does not reappear after the first part of the film. Understandably, the story is disjointed. Favorite line (Yukari, English dub): "Don't talk as if I don't exist." (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Gunmen (Hong Kong, 1988: Kirk Wong)** - One of the more enjoyable traits about Hong Kong action is its ability to often integrate an emotional wallop alongside the action and thus make the entire experience almost cathartic at times. Wonderful examples of this are *Pedicab Driver* and *Once Upon a Time in China*. *Gunmen* attempts to do this with a volatile mix of frantic, frenzied gunplay and high melodrama, but oddly it never quite connects. Looking at the men behind the camera - Kirk Wong as the director and Tsui Hark as the producer - one might conjecture that Wong provided the action while Tsui injected the melodrama into the script. In his role as producer for many films, the extent to which Tsui gets involved is always open to question - it is often rumored that he had a very forceful hand even to the point of directing sections of some of those films. In his dealings with John Woo (*A Better Tomorrow*, *The Killer*) his constant oversight led to an angry rift between the two men.

The action here is terrific - visceral, brutal at times, with rapid editing and a splendid sense of motion - often chaotic but visually eye-grabbing. In his book, *Planet Hong Kong*, David Bordwell often refers to this film as an example of how Hong Kong does action sequences so much differently and more effectively than Hollywood - he says of this film, it "achieves a nervous vigor and, particularly in the finale, a genuine sense of life at risk, down to the bare bones, everything reduced to the settling of scores". The action is often in your face close and personal - a bayonet through the stomach, a close shot to the head, a man on fire and in its most famous scene a small girl picking up a gun and blowing away the bad guy with a bullet to his chest.

The dramatic narrative though doesn't complement the action as well as it could have. The characters are all one dimensional stock personalities - Tony Leung Ka Fai as the honest cop, Carrie Ng as the devoted wife, Elizabeth Lee as the prostitute with a heart of gold - and they never really generate a lot of empathy or interest. Their story plays out like a Taiwanese weepie as every time Tony and Elizabeth come into contact, Carrie coincidentally comes along and sees them and draws her own conclusions and drops whatever she is holding. This being in a large city like Shanghai it feels very contrived and silly. The film also loses some dramatic tension by quickly jumping ahead in time or making blink of the eye scene transitions with no explanation and leaving it to the viewer to catch up with this moving train of a film. It is as if Wong simply doesn't want to waste a moment on exposition if he doesn't have to - but by not developing the characters and plot beyond his shorthand characterizations, the film loses a lot of its potential emotional impact.

During a nameless war in the 1920s (though apparently the laserdisc identifies it as the 1926 Chinese Civil War), Tony and his three friends (Mark Cheng, Waise Lee and David Wu) are about to be tortured and executed by Adam Cheng when the war ends suddenly and the men are on their way home to their families. Tony meets Carrie and in one of those quick jumps - he is next a cop in Shanghai fighting the opium trade with his Captain (played by Yuen Bun). The Captain is killed by a mobster who turns out to be the same man who was about to execute Tony, Adam Cheng - and soon Cheng's boss dies and he blames Tony - leading to both men desperately wanting revenge.

The film takes on vestiges of *The Untouchables* as Tony recruits his three uncorrupt friends to fight the mob and to fight the police bureaucracy symbolized by the by the book superintendent (Tsui Kam Kong). Elizabeth is a lovely prostitute that Tony recruits as an informer and it appears that business turns to pleasure at one point. It all leads to the big finale in which everyone gets involved in the bloodletting from Tony and his men, Tsui Kam Kong, Elizabeth and even Carrie and their daughter - against a horde of bad guys. The film could have been much better with some added time and care paid to the story, but the action and cinematography still make it a very solid effort. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Hard Boiled (Hong Kong, 1992: John Woo)** - The entry point to the Heroic Bloodshed genre for many British lovers of Hong Kong cinema, *Hard Boiled* still delights an amazing twelve years after it was made. It was also John Woo's Dear John... to the Hong Kong film industry and by 1993 he was stateside with *Hard Target*, and has not yet produced an English language film to match his Cantonese classics.



But, while Hollywood compromised him, John Woo allowed his imagination and cinematic showmanship full flight in *Hard Boiled*, strapping his trademark visuals and themes to an RPG and launching them into orbit.

Yep, we're talking favourite films here so only superlatives will do. I am also assuming that fans of [Far East Films] are very familiar with the film so this review contains spoilers.

In 1989 Woo had raised the bar of Hong Kong action cinema with *The Killer* after setting it with his brace of *A Better Tomorrow* films. With *Hard Boiled* he clearly wanted to make *The Godfather* of action movies; a film that so perfectly realises its ambitions it would become a point of comparison for any other genre offering.

Like *The Killer*, *Hard Boiled's* plot is a straightforward story of honour and friendship, loyalty and betrayal. Chow is supercop Tequila, obsessed with tracking down arms traffickers in Hong Kong. After a classic opening teahouse fire fight, in which Tequila kills a key trafficker in revenge for a fallen fellow officer, he sets his sights on Johnny Wong (Wong), arms dealer number one and a fully-fledged psycho to boot.

Wong has recruited Tony (Leung), a hotshot hitman, and makes him prove his fealty by assassinating his boss, Mr Hoi (Kwan), an archaic crime lord bound by a code of honour. Unbeknownst to Johnny or Tequila, Tony is an undercover agent also attempting to break the arms dealing ring. As with 'The Killer' the two finally unite, taking the battle to Johnny and his arsenal of weapons concealed hidden in a hospital. Here begins one of the most beautifully handled action scenes in cinema history, lasting an incendiary thirty minutes.

For the growing number of Woo detractors underwhelmed by his American films (and for Anthony Wong who derided Woo as just another action director, reportedly because he was angered at Kuo Chui's villain being given the same status as his), 'Hard Boiled' is the ultimate riposte and a scintillating display of his directorial power.

Woo directs with the zeal of a dying man completing his one last masterwork, which is not far from the truth. From the opening teahouse gunfight (a reference to past Wong Fei Hung films and HK's action film legacy?) John Woo revels in the language of film, directing with the energy his inspiration Martin Scorsese applied a year earlier to *GoodFellas*. Woo uses deep backgrounds and extreme close ups to set the scene, tracking amongst the protagonists and antagonists, effortlessly establishing who is who. He also pays homage to Sam Peckinpah, another key influence, with expert use of slow motion to punctuate the action and accentuate the impact. Even step printing, ubiquitous in HK action cinema at the time, is brilliantly used to convey wounded movement.

The opening teahouse scene and the climactic hospital conflagration are so intensely mounted and memorable *Hard Boiled's* other action sequences are frequently overlooked. But, the warehouse action scene contains some of the film's most amazing stunts and is bracketed by Tony Leung's stellar performance.

Acting is often overlooked in Hong Kong action movies, dismissed with a sniff that these films are undisciplined copies of more respectable Western, or even mainland Chinese or Japanese cinema. While Chow Yun Fat is the charismatic star of the film, Leung offers the most compelling performance. His boyish good looks frequently clouded by guilt and doubt, Leung offers a tour-de-force of conflicting emotion as he massacres to curry favour with Johnny. 'Hard Boiled' for many was an introduction to Chow and Leung, but also to Wong and Phillip Chui, who memorably plays Mad Dog, Johnny's lethal, though honour-bound, right hand man. Watching Kuo as the hero of numerous Shaw Brothers movies, or as a sympathetic friend in *Lady in Black*, means trying to forget his formidable performance here. Wong too, despite his bad mouthing, is unforgettable as Johnny, icy cold with ambition and greed. Takashi Miike fans will also spot a cameo from Jun Kunimura in the teahouse scene, and Woo himself pops up at Tequila's jazz bar owning mentor.

Woo pushes his actors to express the pinnacles of emotion, and while this robs his films of subtlety it crucially lends weight to his spectacle. And Tequila's one-man army assault on Johnny's men in the warehouse is an awesome spectacle. Maybe the scene is often overlooked because a warehouse is a conventional setting for an action scene, and the teahouse and hospital are fresher to Western eyes. But, the warehouse holds many treasures; explosive stunts with motorbikes, stuntmen (and main actors?) consumed by explosions, and an exclamation mark courtesy of a trademark Woo visual, the two leads face-to-face, guns temple to chin.

Logic is frequently defied as Woo's cinematic swagger turns plot contrivances into directorial élan. Echoing *The Killer*, Tequila investigates a hit executed by Tony and is seemingly telepathically drawn to the hollowed-out volume of Shakespeare (a master of revenge and violence) in which Tony's murder weapon was concealed. Cries of "As if!" are beside the point, Woo's aim is to emphasize the bond his central characters share.

Woo repeats this flamboyant act for the climax, as Tequila's girl (Mo) finds a flower in her pocket at exactly the right time to begin the evacuation of the patients. Realism is not John Woo's watchword, and he proves ostentation works wonders in a film with character and heart.

*Hard Boiled* has been accused of lacking the emotional core of *The Killer*. While the film's only female character is sidelined until the finale *Hard Boiled* is awash with emotion. The problem may be that Tequila is less interesting than the morally compromised Tony. While Tony is trapped between two worlds and forced to jettison his principles, Tequila is a square-Joe myopically pursuing justice and that is never as riveting.

But, the film contains those frissons of unabashed sentiment that mark Woo's best work. For storytelling and character development *The Killer's* key scene is the shoot-out on the beach when Ah Long has to rescue a young girl caught in the crossfire. *Hard Boiled* riffs on this moment frequently in the final thirty minutes, as innocent civilians frequently stray into the paths of bullets, and reaches a giddy zenith as Tony and Mad Dog locked in a deadly duel, lower their guns when a huddle of frightened people come between them. Shockingly, Johnny then mows them down.

The slaughter of civilians in the hospital and the teahouse is not merely cynical carnage. At the time of the film's release Woo revealed *Hard Boiled* was his statement on the 1997 handover of Hong Kong. The hospital is a metaphor for what he believed Hong Kong would become in five years time, a place of crime and open gang warfare where civilians would live and die in fear. When Tequila and Teresa are spiriting the babies out of the hospital, they are literally preserving the future of Hong Kong. Thankfully, this crimewave does not seem to have occurred and Hong Kong actually has a very small number of firearms.

Thematically rich, *Hard Boiled's* climax also stands as a masterpiece of planning and execution. Woo, ably assisted by action director Kwok (credited here as Cheung Jue-Luh), delivers a brilliantly sustained sequence that wracks up the tension and repeatedly outdoes itself. All that Woo has given to action cinema is here: the double Beretta leap through the air, the Mexican standoff, the gleefully preposterous close quarter gunfire played as a dance of death, thousands of squibs, the reflective pauses of the two leads who yearn for an impossible new dawn. The sheer exhilaration of this denouement plays havoc with the audience, traversing a map of emotion from excitement to tension to shock, and finally, as Tequila leaps from the exploding building with baby in hands, utter elation.

The cliché has become to describe Woo's action as balletic, but music in *Hard Boiled* is used in so many ways. Beyond the dated though exciting main action theme (that still works the same way 'The A-Team' theme does), Woo casts Tequila as an accomplished musician, who makes music with a clarinet as well as a handgun. Tequila's bluesy playing often complements Tony's tortured soul searching, and in another nice connection between the two protagonists Tony also makes music, sending his lieutenant (Chan) song lyrics containing hidden communiqués. Tony sends these in bouquets of flowers and sharp eyed viewers will notice Tequila holds a book about flowers when he investigates Tony's hit near the beginning of the film. The climax also begins when Teresa discovers the rose in her pocket.

Is *Hard Boiled* the perfect film then? Of course not, those wanting flaws will find them: as previously mentioned, Tequila is carried by Chow's immense charisma, Tony's method of smuggling a gun into a hospital is lifted from *Terminator 2* (despite what other reports say to the contrary; there are shots replicated from Cameron's film), and a gunfight on Tony's boat seems to have been taken from Michael Mann's pilot for 'Miami Vice'. The film lacks a proper female role, Phillip Chan is the ball-busting chief of a thousand cop movies, and some audiences find the emotive force behind Woo's bullet festivals overblown and off-putting.

But, let the naysayers pick over the latest John Woo disappointment, this is an unabashed love letter to Woo's most accomplished directorial outing and his last truly great hurrah for chivalry. (by Rob Daniel of Far East Films)

**Hard to Kill (Hong Kong, 1992: Philip Ko Fei) - aka Interpol Connection** - Robin Shou is a detective sent to the Philippines to extradite a drug dealer Lo Tat, played by Phillip Kao. This Philippino movie is seriously flawed by incongruous goofy comedy principally involving King Kong. He is capable of better than this. Simon Yam makes an appearance as Robin Shou's deceased partner. The footage appears to be culled from another production. Yukari doesn't make an appearance until the second half of the movie, but when she does her very brief action scenes are explosive. The final confrontation at the drug dealers' ranch is only fair, but does feature Yukari's pole fighting skills. The dubbed Cantonese version is marginally more watchable than the dubbed English version. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Heart of Dragon (Hong Kong, 1985: Sammo Hung) – aka *First Mission*** - I had never seen this movie before - had only heard that it wasn't good - and to be quite honest, as I watched it the first time, looking at Sammo's haircut, I couldn't help but think of 'Simple Jack' from 'Tropic Thunder'. But really - this movie easily won me over, not only with the story, which is decent (and certainly better than those Lucky Stars movies), but with the performances, which are really pretty darn good.

Sammo plays a mentally challenged grown man (with the mentality of a young boy) who is taken care of by his brother, (Jackie Chan) a Police Investigator with dreams of marrying his sweetheart and becoming a sailor. He can't however because his brother isn't capable of caring for himself, and this causes some great dramatic tension, that both Jackie and Sammo are well up to performing. Emily Chu (A Better Tomorrow) plays the long-suffering girlfriend and shares an actual (Hollywood) makeout kiss with Jackie.

Sammo accidentally gets involved in a robbery and Jackie saves the day, leading to a big police chase, stunts, fight, etc.

In fact, there's a little more action in it than people give it credit for - as much, if not more than in the Lucky Stars movies, and it actually flows better into the story than those movies. Plus you have James Tien as the big boss, and Dick Wei as the main bad ass - what more could you ask for? How about a Jackie vs Dick Wei finale fight (while James Tien tries to shoot him), leading into Jackie taking on six guys with crowbars, leading into a final battle with Dick Wei? And this ISN'T Jackie as we know him in this role - he actually straight out kills some people (gun shot, crowbar through the heart) in this role.

My one big complaint - the music - which jumps between cheesy and outright horrible. Well, it was the 80's. (by Chazgower01 of KFF)

**Her Name is Cat (Hong Kong, 1998: Clarence Ford) - aka *The Huntress*** - In 1998 Ford created his most intriguing and stylish film since *Naked Killer* by once again delving into the territory of a female killer and her relationship with a man. In Ford's world falling in love with a man often leads to a woman's destruction – it is their Achilles heel – the chink in their armor – love brings out their sublimated maternal and self-sacrificing instincts which leaves them open to attack. Love with a man rarely leads to anything good beyond fleeting moments of passion and the penalty they eventually have to pay is high. Of course this theme is also prevalent in many HK female assassin films – *Beyond Hypothermia*, *The Other Side of the Sea*, *Black Morning Glory*, *Black Cat* being examples – to be an efficient professional killer affections must be put aside. In many of these films the female assassin is a cold killing machine who is initially rewarded after falling in love by being able to come out of their disassociated emotional shell – but Ford is slightly more perverse in his outlook – his assassins are already fully realized and empowered women who get very little from their often emotionally dysfunctional men. The men are more of a burden than an enlightenment.

*Her Name is Cat* has its share of fans and seemingly an equal share of detractors. It was one of the last attempts to resuscitate the "girls with guns" genre in a serious way (as opposed to recent frivolous films like *Cop Shop Babes* or Ford's own *Martial Angels*), but its weak box office results pretty much put the final nail into the coffin of this genre – though hopefully it will be resurrected some day. In an attempt to give the genre a different feel, Ford fills the screen with gobs of almost Wong Kar Wai like splashy style (in particular ala *Fallen Angels*) – garish off setting colors, distorted dreamlike cinematography and quick edgy editing. Ford though brings his own sense of fetishistic style with a perverse focus on sexual fantasy, whips, handcuffs, bi-sexual pangs and Almen Wong. For some the film simply drowns in this perceived pretentious style, but it makes for some wonderfully visual scenes and gives the film an edge that the script does not. Interestingly once Almen falls in love, much of this style vanishes and the film loses its energy and becomes all too mainstream. So not only does love lead to dire consequences – even worse - it leads to dull predictability.

In a bit of brilliant casting, Ford thrust the fairly unknown (at the time) actress, Almen Wong, into a role in which the actress needs to dominate the screen with her presence for the film to work. Almen is more than equal to the task as she explodes on the screen with a combustible combination of burning sexuality and impressive physicality. The camera soaks luxuriously in these traits and fetishily narrows in on her taut body, ample cleavage, high resolute cheekbones and sweaty workouts. Ford has always been fascinated by sexually alluring and voracious performances – from Chingmy Yau, Nina Li, Carrie Ng and Kathy Chow – and he lets Almen loose on the screen like a wild majestic panther on the prowl for fresh meat. This creates a problem though for the film – the fresh meat that she finds comes in the limp form of Michael Wong and by contrast to her sizzle – he seems like a passing weightless shadow -

and the chemistry that is needed to make the audience care about their fate is never created. One never understands her passion for this man and her sudden turn into a love struck woman never rings true.

The film plays out among a collage of homages to other films. There are nods to *Beyond Hypothermia* - a lesbian agent all too willing to betray and a liking for the simplicity of noodles, *Fallen Angels* - recording your life on a video camera, *Chungking Express* - secret apartment invasion - and *The Killer* - superimposing the changing images of Almen and Michael ala Chow Yun Fat and Danny Lee and protecting a small child in the midst of a gunfight. Calling it homage of course might be giving it a positive spin; others might call it a rehash of other film ideas but Ford does impose his own warped imagination on top of it all for much of the film.

In the film Almen is a killer recruited from the Mainland and she performs a series of hits on triad heads. Michael is investigating the killings and upon seeing Almen save a small child he becomes smitten and pulls himself out of his depressed state caused by the breakup with his wife, Kenix Kwok. He follows her - realizes that she is behind the assassinations - and then Almen starts following him in a perverse game of Peeping Tom. Love grows out of this like a strangled flower looking to root. Almen wants out of the killing business so she can eat noodles, watch cartoons and tie up Michael, but decides she has to take one last job. Much of the plot is in fact routine, but it is driven by its subversive style and a bravura performance from Almen Wong. If Ford hadn't gone soft in the middle of the film it would have become a classic. The poster of Almen has become an icon of HK film - making an appearance on the book cover of *Hollywood East* by Stefan Hammond - but sadly this outfit never makes an appearance in the film. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Her Vengeance (Hong Kong, 1988: Lam Nai-choi)** - Like a bloody beating in the dark, like salt poured on an open infected wound - this film is unrelentingly brutal, painful and somber. The viewer is dragged through a tunnel of muck and despair, but there is no light at the end of this tunnel - just more darkness. It is a journey of pure hate and gut wrenching vengeance that is played out in shadows, tears and rain-drenched nights. The visceral need for vengeance is hypnotic to watch - but there is no catharsis, no release in the end - only more death and consequences to face up to. There are no happy endings when one sets down this path of feral revenge.

On the island of Macao five hooligans (Billy Chow, Shing Fui On and Chen Jing are three of them) have a run in with Pauline Wong and later that night they grab her, drag her into a cemetery and violently rape her - one by one in graphic fashion. They leave her like a used up rag doll on the ground and walk away laughing - they also leave her with a horrible case of venereal disease. In a sense she dies in that cemetery, but like a ghost from the grave she returns for what is hers. When her blind sister (Elaine Kam) finds out what has happened, she immediately tells Pauline that she must find them and kill them. The fact that these are five brutal thugs can't deter her - she must find them and kill them - painfully - as brutally as she was raped. Pauline agrees with the fervor of the newly converted and goes to Hong Kong where the five rapists live. She contacts her sister's ex-husband, Lam Ching Ying, a bar owner who is now trapped in a wheelchair. He won't help her - so she begins the hunt on her own.

There is no hesitation with the first one, but it isn't easy - the first kill never is. She slices off his ear - "do you remember me now" - and pulls the rope around his neck and slowly sucks the life out of him - it takes a while - he fights hard for his life but her hate is stronger. The next one goes wrong - she burns his face with acid - stabs him in the gut - "do you remember me" - but he lives. Now the others know she is after them and the hunted become the hunters - and they begin back in Macao with the sister. It only gets more brutal - the violence and hatred escalates on both sides - a hatchet to the brain and a sharpened iron rod thrust into the belly are only stops along the way. Finally Lam Ching Ying realizes that he must help Pauline to redeem himself - and the two of them set the bait and wait in a room full of deadly booby traps. The finale is unforgettable in its drama and violence - everyone is completely committed to kill the other - even after they are already dead.

Pauline Wong and Lam Ching Ying give terrific performances and are simply riveting. The emotion and passion and hate that they emit in wordless fashion - only through the use of their burning eyes is very powerful. The cinematography captures the darkness of this world - and uses Pauline's angular face almost as a canvass to reflect light and shadows off of. The close-ups of her anger and agony fill the screen with intensity. The film is a one-way road to vengeance - there are no side streets - no moments of respite - no moments of humor - it is all dark and deadly. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Hero (Hong Kong, 1997: Corey Yuen)** - In 1898, a drought in Shantung forces people to flee for refuge to Shanghai, a prosperous but corrupt city due to trade with foreigners. Triads fight for control, especially the ones run by Tam See (YB), backed by the British, and Yang Shuang (YT), backed by the police. Two brothers, Ma Wing Jing (KT)

and Ma Tai Cheung (YW), are among those coming from Shantung. First finding work as coolies, they meet Tam See who is also from Shantung and seeks to mentor them. Eventually, Ma Wing Jing makes a name for himself and begins to steal territory from Yang who wants total control of all criminal enterprises in Shanghai and will harbor no competition.

Fight #1 --- Ma (KT) vs Tam (YB) - Takes place at the pier. More of a sparring match really, on a moving horse and carriage no less. Not very realistic as there's a good bit of wire-assisted stunts but there's some good legwork, especially from YB.

Fight #2 --- Ma vs Axe Gang members - At Club Spring (Tam's club). Ma thwarts a bunch of Yang's goons trying to make trouble. There's some good action here. TK throws some really nice kicks. Good fight!

Fight #3 --- Tam vs Axe Gang assassins - Happens after a meet with Yang. Good stuff from YB. He does some nice bootwork here. There's some cheesy wire-assisted stunts but the action's kind of cool.

Fight #4 --- Ma vs a bunch of crooked cops & Axe Gang members - Not much to this really. TK uses a sword and whacks everybody's arms off. It's a bunch of hack-n-slash, no finesse to speak of.

Fight #5 --- Ma vs Yang's thugs - Ambush! TK again uses some nice kicks! More wire-assisted stunts but good action.

Fight #6 --- Tam vs Yang - After a finale comprised of suicide bombers and full-scale gun battles, YB and YT have at each other. This has some good choreography in places and it's really bloody. What mars it is the editing. Something is really wrong here in 2 regards:

1) Though Yang (YT) is wounded and on the verge of a big death scene, the film jumps to...

2) Tam (YB) suddenly on a precarious piece of scaffolding about to die.

How Tam got in that predicament and how Yang dies are totally missing.

I like this movie. Though set in the late 19th/early 20th century, the action has that Modern 80's feel to it. I liked the story and the sets are great.

The cast is good. I especially enjoyed Yuen Biao in this. Yuen Wah is wasted here as he has no action on film at all in this. Kaneshiro's action scenes are good and he's a decent screen fighter in this. Yuen Tak's fight at the end was great. Wish he'd done more.

One reason I enjoy this is that though it is primarily a dramatic film, comedic instances are inserted and they actually work. And you get to see Wah dressed as a Scotsman...in a kilt. But it's the subtitles that really cracked me up:

Wah's character's nickname is MacDonal (McDonald's).

As both Tam (YB) and Ma (KT) are from Shantung, at one point he says, "From your tongue, I can tell you are my *homeboy*." (Didn't know that term was used back then.)

Another time Tam says, "I want to mash (smash) all of Yang's territories."

Another character states, "I'll writhe (write) to your mother."

Love this stuff. This film also opens with the Shaw Brothers logo. The action isn't as good as some of Biao's other films but preferable to a wuxia film (for me, anyway). It might not appeal to everyone, but it's definitely one for completionists of his films. It's your call. (by Scott Blasingame)

**Hero Dream (Hong Kong, 1992: Lau Siu-Gwan)** - Well I just... I mean... you know. Huh. How about that? I guess to have any hope of communicating effectively about a movie like *Hero Dream* we have to first summarize the concept

of the Hong Kong Cat III film and, more importantly, the batshit insane, anything-goes attitude that drove Hong Kong cinema off the cliff and into pure pandemonium. I'm pretty sure this has come up before, so I'll keep it brief. Or as brief as I ever keep anything. And after that, we can talk about how I racistly can't tell the difference between Chin Siu-Ho and Chin Kar-Lok unless they are standing right next to each other, and even then I have problems unless one of them happens to have a bowl cut and a salmon colored blazer.

So turn back the clock a bit. For most of its prolific lifespan, the Hong Kong film industry had to official rating system for judging the suitability of a film's content for assorted age groups. It was assumed, I assume, that you knew better than some shady room full of old men what was appropriate for yourself or your children. But just as, in the early 1980s, the United States was rocked by a series of violent PG movies that resulted in the creation of the PG-13 rating, Hong Kong had a similar uprising in 1986 when John Woo's hyper-violent gangster film *A Better Tomorrow* pushed bloodshed to a level allegedly hitherto unheard of — which is total nonsense, as anyone who ever watched one of those old movies where Jimmy Wang Yu slashes his way through a hundred bleeding chumps can tell you. Well, whatever the case, by 1988 Hong Kong had instigated its own official rating system. Category I films were suitable for all ages — your kiddie fare and such. It was more or less the equivalent of a PG or PG-13 rating. And the now infamous Category III — Cat III if you're nasty (and you probably are) — well, the stuff that went into that one was an interesting and often insane mix of ultra violence, horror, sexploitation, and volatile political or controversial speech (sometimes all in the same movie).

The ratings system was revised slightly to create IIA and IIB ratings, allowing some movies that might have otherwise been classified Cat III to get the less harsh IIB rating (usually for violence and some incidental nudity). IIB is somewhere between a PG-13 and an R, depending on the mood of the ratings board at any given moment. But Cat III, that's why we're here today. And this is where things get really crazy. Because at the end of the 1980s, and especially throughout the 1990s, there were a lot of Hong Kong film makers who absolutely lost their fucking minds. The industry was more or less controlled entirely by organized crime by this point, so it's not as if they were starting things off with a solid moral compass. The entire country was also staring the barrel of a particularly scary gun. In 1997, after decades of being part of the United Kingdom, Hong Kong was scheduled to leave the British Empire and become part of China proper again — Communist China proper.

For many Hong Kong residents, the thought of suddenly finding themselves under the temperamental yoke of Chinese Communism after being a democracy for so long was worrisome, to say the least. Those who could started formulating their exit strategies. Apprehension about the hand-over permeated almost everything that went on in that final decade of British rule, and nowhere is that more obvious than in the "fuck it all" attitude displayed in so much of the city-state's cinema. Assuming a substantially more repressive atmosphere would be put in place once Beijing was calling the shots, Hong Kong film makers went ape shit, ramming every single piece of insanity they could dream up into their films while the censors through their hands up and pretty much just said, "Whatever, dude." And in the blink of an eye, the Hong Kong film industry started looking like Weimar era Germany. Every sleazy twist, every decadence, every tasteless extreme was being thrown up onto screens under the ubiquitous icon of a triangle containing the telltale "III." One of the weirder sub-categories are the Cat III action films, which usually boast the same sort of cops and kungfu stories of low or medium budget Hong Kong action films (think Moon Lee or Yukari Oshima level productions) but with the addition of a ton of sex and nudity.

But the thing that makes Cat III films really interesting isn't how extreme so many of them were. What's interesting is that even the worst of them were not considered pariah films the way they would have been in the United States. Even the biggest and most respectable of Hong Kong film stars were amenable to appearing in even the seediest and least respectable of Hong Kong's Cat III films. Simon Yam and Anthony Wong, in particular, seemed to spend an inordinate amount of time wallowing in the filth of the Cat III gutters. That's like George Clooney and Denzel Washington appearing in the starring role of an Andy Sidaris film, or one of those Indigo production house movies with a title like *Sex Confessions of a Sexy Voyeur Sex Addict and Probably Also Something About Velvet*. Still, even though Hong Kong's biggest stars were not above slumming it in a sordid sex film or four, the Cat III rating also generated its own set of stars, similar in many ways to the familiar faces who pop up over and over in the cheap direct-to-video American action films of the 80s and 90s. If Cat III has a crown prince, it's bald-headed Elvis Tsui. And if it has an undisputed god-king, it's Charlie Cho.

*Hero Dream* is one of the sleazier Cat III action films. In fact, it's so sleazy and so packed with full frontal nudity and cameras lingering on female pubic hair that it seems almost illegal for it not to have at least co-starred Charlie Cho. Cho must have been busy making twenty other sex films the week *Hero Dream* was made — provided they bothered to take an entire week to film *Hero Dream*. If they did, it certainly doesn't show. There seems to have been absolutely no effort at all to come up with a script, giving the movie a very prevalent "we're just making up scenes as we go until we hit the 85 minute mark." What effort did go into the movie was spent almost entirely on making it as dense with nudity as possible, with a small bit of effort reserved for finding the absolutely most atrocious shirts and ties for Chin Kar-lok. Which brings me to how many years I thought Chin Kar-lok was his brother, Chin Siu-ho. Man, for years I was talking about how the mantle of king of Hong Kong action occupied by

Donnie Yen rightfully belongs to Chin Kar-lok — all the while meaning Chin Siu-ho.

Anyway, the plot, if you can tease it out of all the half-assed writing meant to prole us from one sexy scene to the next, has to do with Chin Siu-Ho's cop character buying giant Garfields for his girlfriend (Carrie Ng, in a totally pointless role) and in his spare time leading some of the most disorganized and idiotic police raids in cinema history. Him and his people pretty much just wait outside for a few minutes then scream and run headlong toward the bad guys, with everyone shouting and firing in random directions with those guns where one shot seems to make like nine guys jump and flail around. When he and Carrie decide to take a vacation in Thailand, a case of swapped cases at the airport (oh, *that* old chestnut) gets the couple involved with murderous gun smugglers, which in turn unceremoniously ushers Carrie Ng's throw-away character out of the movie. Which means it's now up to Chin Siu-ho to track down the killers and get some revenge — a quest that will eventually force him into an uneasy alliance with criminals Chin Kar-lok and the awesome Michiko Nishiwaki (*My Lucky Stars*, *Princess Madam*). Oh, and there's also a gang of transvestites, for the same reason that anything in this movie exists: why the hell not?

Hong Kong Cat III films have given the world some might peculiar stuff, but the most outre examples of the rating's films — your *Boxer's Omens* and such — are so totally weird that you can pretty much deal with them on their own terms. For me, the weirdest examples of Cat III films are the ones where it looks like a completely normal and mundane action film has been stuffed with instances of Cat III craziness. We know what a Hong Kong action movie looks like. So a movie like *Hero Dream* chugs along like a pretty typical example of the lower end of the HK action quality spectrum, and then all of a sudden there's full frontal transvestite nudity and sweaty naked women stacked on top of each other while the camera zooms up their crotches. It's like how people often find it easy to dela with skydiving (a movie like *Boxer's Omen*) because the brain has no context for dealing with something that extreme and so can't fully process the terror, but those same people are petrified of something like bungee jumping because you are close enough to the ground for your brain to recognize how crazy it is to do what you're about to tell it to do.

As far as action films go, *Hero Dream* came out at pretty much the height of the Hong Kong stunt movie craze, and it really doesn't measure up to its peers. And I'm not talking about just your big budget Jackie Chan or Tsui Hark or John Woo films. *Hero Dream* doesn't have that star power or amount of cash, so I don't expect it to be of quite the same caliber. But it's certainly fair to measure it against lower budget films like *Yes, Madam!* or the *Iron Angel* movies, and even against them this is a pretty shoddy looking product. When the Chin brothers face off with each other, we get some spark of good action, but their fights are extremely brief, and none of the movies they pull are enough to distract the viewer from how horrible Chin Kar-lok's haircut and shirts are. It doesn't help that both Chins are really wooden in their roles. I also don't understand the point of casting an always game stuntwoman like Sophia Crawford (most famous for her all nude fight scene with Billy Chow in *Escape from Brothel*) then have her be in the film for the amount of time it takes her to throw a single kick then get shot. Similarly, the statuesque former bodybuilder Michiko Nishiwaki gets to show off her body a wee bit but is sadly underused as a fighter.

With the kungfu getting short shrift, the film tries to serve up a fair amount of gunplay, but it's as sloppy and unengaging as the fighting. It's mostly people just shouting and running en masse at each other while firing randomly, with lots of guys doing the "riddled with bullets" dance. There's no attempt at all to make the shoot-outs logical or possessed of any sort of logic or impact. It's just stuntmen flopping about with no apparent direction. They are basically symptomatic of the entire movie's structure — which is to say, there is no structure. It feels like they just went out and shot a bunch of scenes over a couple days, with no script or attempt at direction, then tried to stitch the entire thing into a feature film during post-production. I've seen Godfrey Ho ninja movies that had more coherent narrative flow.

Which is probably why the film leans so heavily on gratuitous sex scenes. I mean, the film basically starts off with the camera leering in close-up at a naked woman's crotch, so I suppose we should have known from frame one where director Lau Siu-Gwan's heart was really at (and by heart, I mean his dick). Every few minutes, he realizes his action film is a flop as an action film and so uses the most tenuous of links to segue into a sex scene. These, at least, he shoots with considerably more gusto and attention to detail than he does the action scenes, and the women he casts in them (the only one I recognize is Taiwanese pin-up Ga Ling) are better at deliver sex scenes than the action cast is at delivering fights and shoot-outs. Carrie Ng, despite being a vet of many Cat III films who had already proven her willingness to doff her top does not take part in any of the Cat III sleaze — unless you are turned on by scenes of a woman going, "Oh, I have to cook dinner!" while wearing a granny dress and hugging a big Garfield. Michiko Nishiwaki worked hard for the body she has, and she does show off more skin than Carrie, but it's always coyly obscured by the ubiquitous plant leaf or lamp posts that have served film makers so well for so long.

What's more surprising than all the female flesh on display is that this is also one of the few Cat III films to feature male nudity as well. It seems to be a global constant that even in films packed with full frontal female nudity, film makers still shy away from or outright ban the same from men. Cat III films of the era featured more full frontal female nudity in ten years than most industries did in their entire history — yet the number of full frontal male

shots can almost be counted on one hand. *Escape from Brothel* has some fleeting Billy Chow nudity. *Hero Dream* lingers on its bare penises for a longer time — but that's probably because said penises were actually attached to pretty good looking transvestites. But even dangling ladyboy parts aren't as shocking as the fact that this is one of the very very few Hong Kong action films that treats a homosexual with anything approaching respect (relatively speaking, mind you). In a genre where gays and transgendered people are almost always the butt of some joke or are cast as villains, it's actually refreshing (and very little about *Hero Dream* is "refreshing") to see a gang of transvestites who are basically good guys (or girls) — even if most of them meet an unpleasant end.

Director Lau Siu-gwan wasn't actually much of a director, as *Hero Dream* attests to. He cranked out a few other Cat III films (including the requisite film with Charlie Cho) but was mostly known as an actor, albeit one who wasn't that successful. He has no discernable skill as a director other than the ability to point the camera at something and keep it in focus. Which, actually, I guess that's a pretty important skill. I can't find any screenplay credits for *Hero Dream*, which only furthers my suspicion that there was no screenplay, and Lau was just making it up as he went. If that's the case, he's an even worse writer than he is director. His commitment to having no explanation or transition from scene to scene is so intense that it almost becomes an accidental work of art. In one scene, vacationing Chin Siu-ho is swearing to rescue his wife. Cut immediately to him armed with machine guns and a bazooka. Where did all that weaponry come from? Who cares? Certainly this movie doesn't. Hell, it can't even be bothered to tell us what happens to some of the main characters during the finale or to remember that Chin Siu-ho's wife was brutally murdered (mostly because of him) just a couple days before he decides to bang some Thai girl with whom he walks away into the sunset.

Hell, they couldn't even bother to come up with a title that makes any sense. *Hero Dream*? What does that even mean? Well, there's a hero, so I guess we'll throw that in there, and I don't know. He doesn't dream, and nothing that happens to him is dreamy — at least until he forgets his murdered wife a day after he's responsible for her death and hooks up with random Thai girl — which by the way, also ruins the life of one other character, so way to go Chin Siu-ho, you prick. But I guess sometimes sexy movies reference dreams, so there ya go. *Hero Dream*. It's almost as bad as *Thunderball*. What the hell is a thunderball?

So, that's a lot of negative things to say about this movie, somewhat balanced by "but lots o' nudity." However, in my old age, lots o' nudity isn't enough to get me to like a movie, since I know of many, many movies that have lots o' nudity but are also good in other ways. That said, you might think I'm down on poor ol' *Hero Dream*, but that's not the case. It's so poorly made, so unrepentantly scummy, so absolutely sleazy, and so full of gaudy silk shirts that I can't help but love the foul little thing. It's a classic example of the anything goes, fuck it all attitude of Hong Kong Cat III cinema in the final decade before Handover to China. It is thoroughly irredeemable (though in its defense, it also relies on "sexy rape" a lot less than most Cat III movies, *usually* choosing to find more wholesome and consensual avenues for its nakedness). If you're not looking for good film technique, then it's pretty easy to find a lot of idiotic entertainment in *Hero Dream*, crass "make a quick buck" movie though it may be. (by Keith of Teleport City)

**Heroes Shed No Tears (Hong Kong, 1986: John Woo)** - Most folks cite the slick gangster film *A Better Tomorrow* as the breakout film for both director John Woo and actor Chow Yun-fat. And that is, in part, true. It was the film that made them both household names (Chow far more than Woo, at least at the time, when the name of a star was much more important than the name of a director), and it spawned hundreds of imitations. Where Jet Li's *Shaolin Temple* made mainland Chinese kids want to quit school and go join the Shaolin Temple, *A Better Tomorrow* made Hong Kong kids wear Ray Bans and overcoats and quit school to join triad gangs. Woo the Christian pacifist must be really proud of that.

*A Better Tomorrow* didn't come from nowhere though, and a good film fan should be curious about how that film evolved from the muck that was John Woo's largely unsuccessful early career, which he spent making asinine slapstick comedies and other films worth forgetting or never experiencing in the first place. Woo's career as the high priest of "heroic bloodshed" began early on in his career with films like *Countdown in Kungfu* starring a young Jackie Chan and Delon Tam Tao-liang (and Sammo Hung wearing goofy Jerry Lewis novelty teeth in an otherwise very serious role). Things really started to develop in the fine film *Last Hurrah for Chivalry*, which again showed Woo's penchant for male bonding and gore. But this was nothing out of the ordinary for a kungfu film, and certainly nothing out of the ordinary for a disciple of legendary Shaw Brothers director Chang Cheh. It wasn't until Woo was able to add guns into the mix that he really began his journey.

The oft-ignored, intensely violent *Heroes Shed No Tears* is the first film to really mark his break from the inane and stomach churning slapstick "comedies" of his early years and his move toward gun-oriented action films. *Heroes Shed No Tears* is his *Titus Andronicus*. Shakespeare's early drama about feuding families is soaked in gratuitous gore and violence. Tongues are ripped out. Heads are hacked from their bodies then catapulted back to their loved ones during dinner. It is a nonstop parade of brutality, gore, and tastelessness that most Shakespeare scholars like to



pretend never happened. Obviously, it's my favorite play by the guy, and it's important historically not just because it's his first published play (as far as I remember from my time among the Elizabethans), but because it also contains all the elements and themes that would become the crux of Shakespeare's work. They are rough, raw, and not all that well written, but they are most definitely there, taking form like amoebas in a great primordial soup of dramatics.

*Heroes Shed No Tears* is exactly the same thing for Woo. It's horrifically gory and violent — this is not the stylish, over-the-top ballet of violence Woo would become known for. All the basic ingredients that gel in *A Better Tomorrow*, *Bullet in the Head*, and *The Killer* are present in *Heroes Shed No Tears*. They're raw and underdeveloped, but there they are. And just like Shakespeare fans ignore *Titus Andronicus*, most Woo fans have skipped over this mean-spirited little number in favor of his higher profile, more stylish films. And you know, just like I love *Titus Andronicus*, I love this film.

This is, in many ways, a modern-day adaptation of the *Lone Wolf and Cub* story. The underrated Eddie Ko Hung stars as a soldier-of-fortune type leader of a ragtag band of mercenaries fighting the drug cartels in the Golden Triangle. For some reason, he also keeps his family nearby, which you wouldn't think he would do. I mean, if you are out with the boys killing drug smugglers, you have to expect at some point they're going to look for a way to get back at you. It's sort of the nature of the business, you know? And if, after a long day of shooting a bazooka at a warehouse full of heroin or opium, you hop in the jeep and drive down the street to the house where your family lives, well, you gotta sorta expect that the drug smugglers might go there as well.

But never mind that. Ko and the boys capture a bigtime general who is trafficking drugs, and no sooner do they have the cuffs on the guy than they are being pursued by vengeful lackeys. Fearing for their lives, Ko, his men, his son, and a couple other people who serve no real purpose other than to get in the way, all pile into the family jeep, which is really sort of comical. It's like a little clown car or Oddball's tank in *Kelly's Heroes* or possibly the antlers of the title character in *Thidwick the Big-Hearted Moose*, where the moose had like two dozens assorted animals hitching a ride on his antlers.

The nastiest thorn in Ko's side is a maniacal military man played by the one-eyebrowed priest himself, Lam Ching-ying. A lot of people site Lam Ching-ying as being the soldier-of-fortune in this film. Obviously, those people are insane or just don't know who Lam Ching-ying is. He is the crazy general, not the noble hero. Sort of like me. He engages in a series of very bloody gunfights with Ko's men, and even bullies some spooky but cool local trackers to badger, kill, and set booby traps for Ko. One of the most notably *Lone Wolf and Cub* inspired moments comes when Ko's son is trapped in a burning field and buries himself to escape the flames. If you are up on your *Lone Wolf* stories (an incredibly violent series of Japanese comic books and films about a lone samurai assassin who roams the bloody countryside with his little son in tow), one of the films features a scene where wee son Daigoro is trapped in the middle of a burning field and does exactly the same thing. Or maybe that's just something they teach in Asia, the "stop, drop, and bury" method of fire prevention.

As Ko and his boys fight their way across the rural landscape of ... Thailand? Burma? Laos? I can't remember, but as they do it they meet a variety of other-worldly characters, including a pot-smoking American soldier and his wife. The entire journey is somewhat surreal, and it actually reminds me a lot of *Apocalypse Now* in that as the journey progresses, things get increasingly primitive, alien, and weird.

Woo takes the violence way over the top in a grueling scene in which Lam Ching-ying, who has one of his eyeballs shredded when Ko shoots it out through the scope of the sniper rifle Lam was aiming through (a scene that has been ripped off dozens of times since then, including *Sniper* and *Saving Private Ryan*), extracts horrifying revenge on a captured Ko by attempting to sew his eyelids open. This is shown from **Ko's point of view** as Lam giggles and we see the dangling, bloody thread drooping in and out of our vantage point. This is actually even more disturbing and gross than I'm expressing. When Ko is rescued, his son has to chew the threads out of his dad's eyelids. I don't know why he had to chew them out, but hey — who am I to argue? That kid beat an entire field of fire.

Despite the obviously low budget, *Heroes Shed No Tears* (especially when you sew their eyes open) has a lot going for it. It's pretty much non-stop action from the opening scene, and it's easily Woo's most relentlessly downbeat, gory film. That's saying a lot when you remember the films Woo would go on to make. The film is fast-paced and exciting, and best of all, all bets are off on who is going to die. None of the characters are all that well developed, but Woo has never been a master at realistic characters. His people are always caricatures, symbols, and archetypes. This actually aids the film, because you never really know who is going to buy it. In a Hollywood film, you know exactly who will die in a war movie. The noble leader will die. The jack-ass of the bunch will have a heroic change of heart at some crucial moment, and he will sacrifice himself. The guy with the girl back home who writes him to tell him she's in love with someone else will probably die. The nerdy pacifist guy with wire-rimmed glasses and a notebook full of writing will probably end up having to kill a lot of people in the end, but he'll probably live and be the film's narrator. He'll also be named "Scoop" or "Squirt" or "Specs" or something suitably nerdy.

But in *Heroes Shed No Tears* pretty much anyone is fodder for the cannon. You half expect even the main guy to buy it halfway through, or even the little kid. You won't find too many films these days that beat the shit out of a little kid with as much glee as this film does. And he's not even that annoying, so you actually feel bad for the boy. Despite shallow characters, Woo successfully makes you feel for their plight and root for them on their utterly unreal odyssey through a mad landscape. And of course, there is lots of friendship, bonding, exploding, and slow motion gun fights. Woo would become a much better technician in later films, but there is so much passion and energy in this film that you can't help but be taken in by it. It's uneven in places, but it's liking watching a surreal wartime flashback. *Apocalypse Now* meets *Lone Wolf and Cub* meets *Southern Comfort* (the movie, not the drink). It's not Woo's most talked about film, but it's deserving of more attention, and like I said, it's a boiling primordial soup in which all his signature themes and stylistic innovations can be seen in their embryonic, rudimentary stages. (by Keith of Teleport City)

**Heroic Fight (Taiwan, 1986: Chiu Chung-Hing)** - This film is like opening a door and unexpectedly walking into a howling wind tunnel. It is so full of near non-stop acrobatics, antics, fights, contraptions, gadgets, wires, weapons and total lunacy that I needed to hold on to my head to stop it from spinning! The sheer silliness, exuberance and imagination of the film made it a complete sugar over dosed delight. Most delightful is the physical performance of the petite Lin Hsiao Lan as she jumps over fences, scales walls, swings through the air, performs amazing stunts, shoots blow darts and takes on Dick Wei in brutal kung fu combat.

She is something of a cult figure for her performances in the period costume films *Child of Peach*, *Kung Fu Wonderchild* and *Magic of Spell* in which she plays characters with magical powers who fight for good over evil. This film is set in contemporary times (though there is a fun homage to her other films as well as one for *A Better Tomorrow!*), but Lin is just as amazing fighting for good once again in this film.

A portly but very nasty triad head is trying to force an elderly businessman into distributing drugs for him, but Mr. Duh refuses. So this nasty triad decides to kidnap Duh's small granddaughter – Ting Ting – and this is where our heroes enter the story. Lin is first sighted combating an array of underground ninjas and then a supernatural beast, but it turns out that it is only a movie set. She is an action actress, her two brothers are stuntmen and her father, Yuen Chung Yan (one of the famous Yuen brothers) is the props/special effects man on the set. They live in a house or make that a room that is a nutty Rube Goldberg fantasy in which every item is somehow tied to a pulley or a lever – even the salt shakers! Hidden doors, dropping walls and other devices just round out this normal family's living conditions. Needless to say it all comes in very handy later on.

So Ting Ting is kidnapped at McDonalds by Mickey Mouse tying a bunch of balloons around her wrist thus lifting her to some waiting thugs five floors above! Lin witnesses this and gives chase on her speedy bicycle - but no ordinary bike is this – the U.S. Defense Department would pay billions for this bike – as it contains every imaginable device ever needed to save a little girl from being kidnapped or for starting a small revolution.

After saving Ting Ting by utilizing some unbelievably amazing aerodynamic and kung fu biking, she meets Mr. Duh. The grandfather is worried that there will be a further attack on him (which in fact there is – a bomb planted in a Penthouse magazine) – so he arranges for Lin's family to use their film expertise to pretend to assassinate him so that he can leave the country for a while. But things go very wrong afterwards and all of a sudden the film takes a shrieking turn towards the very violent. A sea of dead bodies killed by darts to the head, explosions, kung fu, poison snakes and various other bizarre implements – primarily by the courtesy of Lin – is soon spread like butter over warm toast all over town. And then there is still Dick Wei to contend with.

This is a crazy, goofy, fun film that keeps surprising you with its cleverness and its attitude of “why not try it”. There is no time for things like character development or even much of a plot – but it is a complete hoot that should entertain those who enjoy films that don't take themselves seriously for a second and veer wildly between complete silliness and fast moving shake your head in disbelief action. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**High Risk (Hong Kong, 1995: Wong Jing) – aka Meltdown** - “You can beat me, but you can't beat my dad.” – Frankie Lone

Frankie Lone (Jacky Cheung) is a former martial artist turned actor who drinks, carouses, completely overacts and aghast, has body doubles during difficult stunts, though he is advertised as doing all of his stunts often using his bodyguard Lee Git (Jet Li, a bit of irony here is that Li is doubled in this film.) Of course his *yojimbo* is much more a man than he is and is played a bit too robotically which is unfortunate because Li does have more depth as an actor

though sometimes you would not know this from his roles in the 1990s. Lee Git (aka Corny Man) lost his wife and son to a bomb diffusion of a busload of hostages gone wrong two years before. All Lee has is the voice of the perpetrator. We know him as the Doctor (Kelvin Wong; hey, did I not just see him in *Don't Give a Damn*) a mysterious bad guy who was possibly involved in a previous war who has a Mandarin speaking Mainland crew.

In the meantime two reporters led by Helen Lok (Chingmy Yau) are trying to uncover if Jackie I mean Frankie uses a stunt double. They follow him to an event at the Granedur Hotel (a take-off of the Grandeur Hotel just kidding it is a misspelling which later is spelled correctly) where there is a show for the rich and famous displaying 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian Tsar's Nicolas II crown jewels on the 75<sup>th</sup> floor penthouse. In that hotel is an undercover cop's girlfriend Jayce (Charlie Yeung) whom the Doctor has taken a liking to and who will get mixed up in what has to be one of the not-so-brilliant heists I have seen. By coincidence Lee Git overhears the Doctor while driving away and with Jayce's boyfriend they find a way back into the hotel. Will they succeed in thwarting the heist? Who will die? Will Frankie redeem himself?

Frankie's manager (Charlie Cho) is a parody of Jackie Chan's manager Willie Chan and Frankie's dad (well played by Wu Ma) is of course a reference to Jackie Chan's dad. Really this whole movie is a combination of a parody of *Die Hard* (at the time one of Wong Jing's favorite Hollywood films; the Chinese release title of *Die Hard* was Tiger Courage, Dragon Might while this film's Chinese title 鼠膽龍威 translates to *Mouse Courage, Dragon Might*), a satire on Jackie Chan with random bits of references to *Speed*, Bruce Lee with Game of Death suit and Lee style vocal noises, of course Wong Jing's own bizarre humor involving urination and much more.

Wong Jing is certainly an auteur in the way Roger Corman is and has a "throw in everything including the kitchen sink" type of attitude with many of his films. This has brought the disdain from many more serious Hong Kong directors like Ann Hui. Because Wong Jing is so prolific he can be quite sloppy in his films and makes me wonder how much he delegates to the second unit, action directors and whoever else is nearby. If you start to think while watching this you might wonder where and why did the bad guys bring lots of snakes and a reptile just to throw on a woman who they did not know would actually be in the bathroom beforehand? Even more ridiculous was the reptile venom antidote in a non-hospital building. Or how about how twice people seemed nonplussed to see a gang of armed assailants. Hey there is shady looking people with automatic weapons, I'll say hi. Or how about how the reporters got a picture of Jet Li coming straight down when they were filming at an angle. Also, how did Song Bong (Billy Chow with an insane mullet that would fit well on a mid-90s WWF wrestler) find Frankie? The use of dummies is quite obvious in the action scenes, almost as obvious as in *Casa de mi Padre* (2012) though while humorous does make it seem a bit cheap – almost as cheap as the miniature sets they used.

Now it is certainly entertaining in many aspects. While the biting satire of Jackie Chan does go overboard and Cheung's overmugging does sometimes get annoying, it is effective and eviscerating attack on Jackie. I was thinking that it should have been more subtle, but I am writing about Wong Jing here and I believe he was trying to be obviously mean. I can easily understand why Jackie Chan was angry about this.\* Some of the jokes are funny such as the crotch-grabbing corpse scene which is almost Stephen Chow like. I overall enjoyed the fighting scenes by Corey Yuen. The fisticuffs and footacuffs (not a word, but it should be) with Jet Li and Ben Lam is exciting and well done with nice use of objects you do not normally expect to see. The same goes with the main fight between Jackie Cheung and Billy Chow which is somewhat reminiscent of the finale in *The Young Master* in which Frankie goes all out to the point of hurting himself. Though I do not think he is always effective with gun battles such as instances where rolling your body helps avoid machine gun fire and no matter how many shots are fired they cannot hit Jet Li (even with an M-60 at close range.). This reminded me of his less-than-stellar gun battles in his directed film *Bodyguard from Beijing* (1994). But these issues are less noticeable the first time you watch it since Wong Jing keeps a fast pace throughout.

In 1992 and 1993 director/writer Wong Jing worked with Jackie Chan on *City Hunter* (1993). Reportedly it was not a pleasant experience for either. But Wong definitely dished a certain amount of cold cinematic revenge with this film, though at a particular cost. While I have not found a primary source on the matter, it has been stated that Li apologized to Jackie Chan for being in this film. It is somewhat telling that Jet Li did not work with Wong Jing as a director again and in most interviews with Jet Li I have read/heard states he has been on friendly terms with Chan. But Li is known for being cordial and usually has polite answers. Li would also later work with Jackie Chan in 2008's *The Forbidden Kingdom*. Now Frankie's character is redeemed by the end. An all-out assault on Jackie would have had a more biting ending.

I have two R0/NTSC Universe copies with two different disc covers: a (oooh) shiny one with no decorations and one with Jet Li with a tie. This release has Chinese and English subtitles burnt-in and your choice of the Cantonese and

Mandarin audios. On the Cantonese audio you can also hear the antagonists and several others speaking Mandarin and some English is used throughout as well. The print quality is OK, but it is soft and has artifacts (digital noise especially) throughout. I also have a R1/NTSC Columbia Tri-star DVD. On that: the US cut is slightly cut by 29 seconds, though it loses none of the violence. As usual the English dub is not always saying what is in the HK release. It does not have the artifacts that the Universe has, but unfortunately does not have the Cantonese or Mandarin soundtrack yet has a French one. There are optional English and Spanish subtitles. For extras there are Talent Files, Trailer (English), Trailer Gallery (*Once Upon a Time in China I-III* set, *Red Dragon*, *Gorgeous*, *The Prisoner*) and Photo Gallery with Jet Li Trivia.

\* I recently read *Almost Interesting* (2015) by David Spade and Spade writes about the infamous issue where he made fun of Eddie Murphy with [one comment in a skit](#) and Murphy was upset with him for years. But issues like this are nothing new in cinema. For example William S. Hart (a famous silent cowboy actor) made some disparaging remakes about Buster Keaton's friend Roscoe Arbuckle and Keaton retaliated by making a Hart spoof *The Frozen North*. (by Masterofoneinchpunch of KFF)

**High Voltage (Phillipines, 1995: Andrew Kam, Donnie Yen) – aka Asian Cop** - (Let me just say this from the get go: I don't normally write these reviews with a sense of juvenile humor. Having said that....there were translations in the dialogue that had me cracking up. I beg your forgiveness in advance.)

Yen is Chiang Ho Wa, a cop recently disciplined for his field tactics due to their rash violence resulting in a hostage being injured. He seeks to go on unpaid leave. Instead he's off to the Philippines looking for Dick (see?), a man responsible for multiple murders. There he's paired with Inspector Edu.

While helping Edu escort an informant, they are attacked. A wild shoot-out ensues and Yen wounds another hostage, the informant. Edu tells Yen: "You can't find Dick." Yen stares at him and an assassin kills the informant.

They go to a club and Edu informs Yen that gays are known to patronize the place. (Why would that concern him based on Edu's previous comment?) They're looking for the informant's girlfriend, Jenny. Yen gets into a fight with some of the patrons and, no, they're not gay. It's a really good fight btw. They then find Jenny at her apartment (how? who knows) but she won't help.

The next day while wandering about the city, Yen spots Dick and follows him to a society affair. Now they are aware of one another. They have a past as it seems Dick killed Yen's wife. (I'm sorry.)

An assassin pays Yen a visit at his hotel room. It's a super under-cranked fight but it's good.

Dick has a meet set up with Americans at the docks. While they're staking out the meet, Edu's partner, Billy, asks: "Why Dick doesn't come?" Oh, and Dick's contact is a Mr. Johnson. (I'm not making *any* of this up.) Yen crashes the meet and there's a big shoot-out.

After a night out of karaoke with Jenny, Billy gets blown up with a basketball by Dick's thugs as they walk down the street. Yen is ordered to return to China.

Dick's boss, Mr. Cadosa, puts a hit on him for trying to subvert his authority and take over the operation. It's a big shoot-out in the street in broad daylight but Dick and his gang survive. One of his men, known as Leopard, looks like a Laurence Fishburne clone.

Later, Yen walks in on Dick killing Cadosa. He then turns Yen over to the cops to be arrested as he's disobeyed his orders to leave for China. A hit is put on Jenny who has called Edu who is passing by as the squad car carrying Yen inexplicably wrecks. (You follow all of that?) They then go to find her. (You know, I don't remember them finding her.)

They go after Dick. Edu catches him in a parking deck and wrecks his car into a wall of baskets (yes, baskets). A car chase ensues.

Meanwhile, Yen and Leopard have a fight in a tunnel. There is heavy slo-mo and super under-cranking (which is typical of Yen's choreography) but it's a really good fight.

Yen then arrives as Edu catches Dick. He decides to let them have at each other. It's a very brutal fight in the rain but filled with way too many quick cuts. Still, it's pretty good.

This isn't a bad movie. Not Yen's best and certainly not his worst either. I would put this slightly above "Ballistic Kiss" though not by much. Still, it's another one for completionists. (by Scott Blasingame)

**Hitman (Hong Kong, 1998: Stephen Tung Wei) – aka Contract Killer** - The title probably says a lot. Mr. Tsukimoto has been assassinated, for a good reason too, and he had left a \$100,000,000 fund for his revenge. His son plans on finding the assassin and inheriting the fortune, but many others are lining up for the money as well. Jet Li takes up the position as well in order to make money for his mother.

This is the kind of movie that *Bodyguard from Beijing* should have been. Lots of settings, great acting, and, for not having much in the way of martial arts, this movie kept me so entertained that I'd like to watch it again. The gunplay is abundant, and what's there is awesome. The action also consists of foot races through various scenes, and the relationship that develops between Fu (Li) and Uncle Nor, his "agent", is so cool. Fu has to become a hitman, and Nor is training him in multiple scenes. Dressing, shooting, eating, living, it's all very entertaining.

Li does some martial arts with different cast members. There's a tall American guy, and I don't know his name, but he's pretty good and fights with Li in 3 scenes, one of which is pretty short and has mostly gun fighting. The other 2 have some good-looking moves, many of which impressed me with Li's agility and quickness. And the wirework was kept to such a minimum that they didn't even use it except maybe 4 times, 1 was when Li jumped up among some... now that I think about it there may not have been wires there. Li moved up the side of a building pretty quickly, almost too quickly, and that's why I suspected. So, if there were wires, they were done properly. The other one was used to make a kick look powerful by pulling the other person backwards, which always looks fine. So, I was impressed with all of that.

The cinematography was what really makes the film shine, along with the plot itself. The camera work is very classy and not cut up. Every scene is well shot and gives the viewer a good idea as to what's happening. The music is well composed and fits very well, although the sounds at times seemed muffled. But it's hardly noticeable, and it lasts for some short moments. Hell, I dunno, maybe that kind of shotgun does sound muffled. So, I can't judge that.

*Hitman* is extremely good. Good everything. The romance that is there is short but adds to character development just enough. It doesn't go overboard like it did in other movies like *Gorgeous* or *Bodyguard from Beijing*. Plus, the scenery changes all the time. It never takes place in one spot for longer than 15 minutes.

I recommend this movie to everyone. I give it a 10/10 because I liked it so much. It's a very classy gun movie and has a great mix of everything. (by Eric Jacobus of the Stunt People)

**Holy Virgin vs. the Evil Dead (Hong Kong, 1991: Tony Liu)** - How can you *not* watch a movie with a title like that?

Folks familiar with the ebb and flow of Hong Kong films would, at first blush (heh heh) be tempted to lump this movie in with the flood of Category III (read: NC-17) films that marked the end of the protectorate's cinematic renaissance that began with John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow* and Tsui Hark's *Zu, Warriors of the Mountain*. Iterations of balletic gun-and-swordplay eventually gave way, as the approaching specter of mainland China loomed, to the more blatantly exploitative films like *Raped by an Angel*, *Naked Killer* and *Human Sausages*.

But no, *Holy Virgin vs. the Evil Dead* comes to us toward the last quarter of that renaissance, 1991. And the first thing that lets you know what is about to come is the title sequence at the beginning, which is a combination of Al Adamson "here are some images from our upcoming feature" graphics and a James Bond dancing girl. In fact, were this reviewed by [Oh the Humanity!](#), it would be one of the few movies to which they could answer "Naked Girl Dancing During Credits?" with a resounding *yes!*

Then, just to make sure we didn't miss the implications, we are treated to a lady skinny-dipping in her pool. We have no idea who she is, or what she has to do with the movie, but since she likes to lounge around nude, she might not be the Holy Virgin of the title.

Mr. Shiang (Donnie Yen) is toasting some marshmallows with five of his pretty teenage students after they've attended some festival or other. Bizarrely, the moon turns blood red and all of Shiang's students are attacked and

killed (after being stripped to various degrees) by a tall, long-haired assailant with glowing green eyes. Though Shiang battles valiantly to protect his charges, the killer is possessed of superhuman strength. When Shiang regains consciousness, he is surrounded by dead bodies.

Naturally, the police assume that Shiang is the murderer, or, as they like to say, "the sexual maniac". Shiang's pal, Chiou, a cheap private eye, bails out the scholar (by showing up with a knapsack full of loose change!); the two set out to find the true killer. Complicating matters is the fact that the woman skinny-dipping in the first scene is Shamen, Shiang's ex-wife... and she's sleeping with Sgt. Chen, the main detective on the case!

Leaving Shiang for the moment, who is under constant police surveillance, we are introduced to a couple doing the wild thing in a car. Since we have not seen them up until this point in the movie, Death must be just around the corner. What did I tell you? The moon turns red, the woman develops a nasty case of green eye, and proceeds to chow down on her boyfriend's throat. She then travels to a near-abandoned building, where our old pal, the true Sexual Maniac, is meditating before the idol of some hermaphroditic god. After taking the opportunity to rip off the possessed girl's clothes, his eyes glow, throat gets ripped out, etc., etc.

The next day, Chiou manages to sneak past the police into the murder scene and get a picture of the idol. He and Shiang are advised to consult with the aged Director Chor at the local university. Once there, it's bad news, good news: the bad news is that Chor has gone to his reward. The good news is, his daughter, Yi Yan, has taken over his position and is every bit as knowledgeable. She is also cute as the dickens.

Yi Yan is not terribly helpful until Chiou shows her the picture of the idol, at which point she tells the two about a clan of the wilds of Cambodia, the High Wind Tribe, with whom her father was so friendly they gave him one of their sacred books. This book not only has a picture of the idol, the God of All Mothers, but also foretells the coming of the Moon Monster, an evil spirit whose predations are signaled by the moon turning red.

This Cambodian angle is interesting to Chiou, as he overheard at the crime scene that the building the Sexual Maniac/Moon Monster was squatting in is owned by a Cambodian named Ma Tien. Ma Tien is, at the time, giving the Moon Monster hell for killing the woman in his building, and thus dragging his name into the proceedings. Time to speed things up, he tells the Moon Monster; what they need is a woman "born in Yin timing". To find her, Ma Tien gives the Moon Monster a seashell that will ooze blood when she is near.

Wandering around town waiting for a seashell to start bleeding might seem like an awfully unsure means of locating someone, but then, none of us are Cambodian sorcerers. In fact, Moon Monster soon finds himself with a handful of blood outside a house - as luck would have it, it's Shamen's house, and Yi Yan has dropped by to try to convince Sgt. Chen of Shiang's innocence, and the existence of the Moon Monster. Chen is predictably skeptical - until the Moon Monster *flies* across the pool to grab Shamen! Chen empties his revolver into the long-haired kidnapper, then tries his martial arts, with no more luck than Shiang had. It's not until the Moon Monster falls in a pool and Yi Yan drops a power line into the water, making Moon Monster soup, that the supernatural dynamo is stopped.

Ah, but if you know your movie villains (and we do) he isn't so much *stopped* as *paused*. The Moon Monster rises from the dead that night and eviscerates the unfortunate morgue attendant. Two policemen enter, and for once, we see two cops do the sensible thing when confronted with a naked dead man with green lightning coming out of his eyes and a fistful of intestines: they run like hell..

Meantime, Shiang visits Yi Yan at the library, interrupting her late night studies with some fast food. Too bad Shiang hasn't figured out that any female he gets close to will die. Smarting from the Jacuzzi of Death incident, the Moon Monster comes to the library, everything goes red and Yi Yan is hit in the face with some sort of cartoon. Later we are told "Her head still hasn't been found!"

Enough is enough, figure our heroes, and hop on the next plane to Cambodia. Ah, festive Cambodia! Where the High Wind tribe prepares to see if the visiting Prince Wolf is worthy of their Princess White. Finally (!) *here* is our Holy Virgin. Wolf is game enough - this is one of those he-must-defeat-her-in-fair-combat-to-marry-her deals - but White is one of those martial artists who can fly around in-between boots up the opponent's butt. Rueful, bruised and respectful, Wolf withdraws to his kingdom, doubtless to practice like a sumbitch.

Almost immediately, a fierce windstorm whips up. White's father, the Chief, informs her that this is indicative of the return of the Moon Monster (it must be hard to sneak up on someone when you're the Moon Monster...). He summarily gives her the village's Magic Sword™, and sends her down the mountain to kill it.

While Shiang, Chen and Chiou proceed to scope out Ma Tien's opulent villa, Shamen investigates as only a woman can - by shopping. Finding a mask of the God of All Mothers in a shop, she convinces the merchant to tell her about the local legend. He doesn't even get as far as '*In the beginning*' before a figure wearing a Buddha mask stabs him in the back. Shamen finds herself beset at all sides by assailants wearing various mythological masks, and proves herself no slouch in the bootay-kicking department. The bad guys cheat, however, and pull guns, taking her hostage.

Speaking of women dispensing generous amounts of whoop-ass, White is having a hell of a set-to with the Moon Monster in some picturesque ruins. The Magic Sword™ lives up to its name, letting loose with the occasional lightning bolt and generally behaving like a cattle prod when it hits the Moon Monster. After shocking him into a pit, White tosses in a lit bundle of dynamite. Take that, Sexual Maniac!

The three amigos, meantime, see Shamen being escorted into Ma Tien Central. Chen is all for rushing in with his one little automatic pistol, but Shiang, seeing a whole bunch of hirelings carrying M-16s, urges him to wait for Ma Tien's next move. Good thing that cool heads prevail, because on their return trip to the hotel, the three find White who has passed out on the side of the road from her wounds.

All these martial artists usually need is a few hour's sleep to get better, so White is soon joining forces with our HK heroes to take down Ma Tien. The Moon Monster is no longer a problem, White assures them. Of course, just as soon as she makes this assertion, Moon Monster digs himself out of the rubble.

Sgt. Chen goes to Tien's villa alone to trade the holy book of the High Wind Tribe for Shamen's release. The others sneak in under this distraction, smacking down guards as they go (which pretty much what Chen wanted in the first place, wasn't it?). Why, oh why does anyone ever trust white suit-wearing villains? Ma Tien gratefully accepts the book, then informs the dismayed policeman that he still has need of Shamen. Then, for punctuation (and because we haven't seen any breasts in a half an hour) the sorcerer rips off her halter top (?).

This is as good a time as any for our other heroes to get spotted by the guards, and machine gun fire to erupt all around. Our heroes make typically short work of the hirelings, and almost rescue Shamen from the escaping Ma Tien when the Moon Monster shows up, flying low and ripping out a big dang chunk of Chen's belly. White and her magic sword succeed in turning away the Moon Monster, but everyone withdraws to get Chen to a doctor.

Shiang, Chiou and White must then leave Chen behind, and complete the journey to the High Wind Tribe's village, only to find everyone up at the holy place, where Ma Tien, disguised as the God of All Mothers, holds the tribe in his thrall. Commanding them to follow his "son", the Moon Monster, Ma Tien then announces it is time for that all-important 'woman born in Yin timing.' The hypnotized Shamen immediately drops her clothes... as do the *eighteen other women* behind her! ¡Ay Chihuahua!

The naked Shamen drops to her knees before the Moon Monster, and things look like they might go *quite* pornographic, but the Chief, who is strung up on the altar, breaks the mood by shouting, "Bastard!" Incensed, the Moon Monster does the manual disembowelment thing on him, prompting White to fly in and start whoompin' ass. Ma Tien's henchmen (the ones who survived the massacre at the villa.... apparently a *lot* of them did!) open fire, prompting the tribesmen and all eighteen naked women (yes, I counted them) to stampede. Luckily, Shiang and Chiou find the two Guns That Do Not Run Out Of Ammunition Until It Is Dramatically Appropriate, by which we mean when the miraculously recovered Chen arrives with what appears to be a belt-fed M-60 machine gun.

Chen is really, really good with that machine gun, too. He manages to gun down all the lackies surrounding the still-naked Shamen without one bullet ever coming close to her - and he never takes his finger off the trigger! Chiou winds up getting killed while reloading, but what the hell - he was the comic relief. Ma Tien and Sgt. Chen finally go at it hand-to-hand, and the wounded cop is about to be impaled by Tien's spear when Shamen, clad in a slinky black gown - who knows where the *hell* she found it - crops up with an M-16 and ventilates Ma Tien thoroughly. She *loved* that halter top!

Shiang and White have fought the Moon Monster all the way back to the village, and the berserk Monster is more than a match for both of them, until a lunar eclipse blots out the red moon. Shiang realizes that the not-very-cryptic final passage of the holy book instructs them to slam the magic sword through the head of the Moon Monster during this eclipse. White manages this with Shiang's help, and the Moon Monster dies a gooey, echoing, bladder-inflating death, then vanishes in a welter of laser effects left over from *Lifeforce*.

The next day, the remaining four indulge in some Scooby-Doo post-mystery banter, until a man in a boat passing under them calls out to them. *Who is that?* they wonder. *Who is that man?* It's the Moon Monster! He's not dead after all! *Crap!* The end.

This may sound like the answer to every bad movie fan's dream, combining as it does kung fu, gun fu, and as Joe Bob Briggs would say, breast fu. You could, indeed, do a lot worse than *Holy Virgin vs. the Evil Dead*. Unfortunately, you could also do a lot *better*.

Though I said earlier this movie smacks of the mid-90's Category III sleazefests, its true companions are firstly: the Shaw Brothers mid-80s *Seeding of a Ghost*. Infamous and near-legendary, *Seeding* married horror, gooiness, and gratuitous nudity. Secondly, the Golden Harvest *Seventh Curse*, which combined action and horror to much better effect (We'll visit the delights of *Seventh Curse* one of these days... it's one of my favorites). The gunplay scenes in *Holy Virgin* aren't too exciting - nobody runs right into the line of fire like a bunch of HK action film henchmen. Most of the fight scenes are well-done, but short, and as it is a Donnie Yen film, are slightly speeded-up, a practice I abhor - it serves only to cheapen the superb athleticism of the actors.

In fact, the story is so slight, that I highly suspect an AIP-style genesis here: somebody thought of the title before they had a story. The plot glosses over any number of logical problems, and throws a lot of characters at us; although the death of Yi Yan is dramatically apt, the jettisoning of Sgt. Chen's female partner - she delivers the Dirty Harry Speech and quits - has all the feel of someone lightening the load so we can *finally* introduce another character and get on to the Cambodian story arc that leads up to our title bout.

Nor do any of these characters inspire much empathy. Shiang is portrayed in a fairly hangdog manner. Admittedly, he is going through a world of sh\*t, but it doesn't make for a very dynamic protagonist. Chen's bedding the ex-wife of his chief suspect seems a blatant violation of procedure and ethics. Chiou is called upon simply to make the occasional wacky statement that defies translation. And White is only in the last half of the movie. The character we wind up closest to is Shamen, not because the character is any less underwritten than the others, but because she is naked so much of the time. Brave actress. Quite pretty, too.

I'm sorry, my mind was wondering for a while there. Where was I? Oh yeah. Although the action elements are all there, the story is so rudimentary that there is no real canvas for those brush strokes to join and make a whole picture. But I am haunted by a old memory: myself and my best friend plopping into my family's station wagon and going to the Skyway Twin Drive-in Theater on Wednesday night (when admission was \$1.00 per person) to see stuff like *Student Teachers* and, um, something with *Nurses* or *Cheerleaders* in the title. We did not sit through those for the story or characters. We watched them for the nekkid chicks. A flick like *Holy Virgin vs. the Evil Dead* would have seemed liked Manna directly from the Main Office. Not only would we have gotten our boob shots, but some decent gunplay, gore and fight scenes in-between.

Come to think of it, a double bill with this and something like the Jean Rollin (retitled) *Caged Virgins* would have kicked ass down at the Skyway Twin. Had it been made and imported fifteen years earlier, it could have been the Ultimate Drive-In Movie. (by Freeman Williams)

**Honor and Glory (Hong Kong/USA: Godfrey Ho) – aka *Angel the Kickboxer*** - A crazed and corrupt super rich Banker called Jason Slade (John Miller), wants to obtain a deadly nuclear arsenal. T.V News Reporter Joyce Pride (Donna Jason) is out to expose Slade to the world. Meanwhile her high-kicking FBI agent sister Tracy (Cynthia Rothrock), is also out to stop the mad money man. Only Slade has a gang of killers for hire at his disposal, and he doesn't plan on backing down.

*"Only death, can retire Jason Slade"*

Another U.S/Hong Kong co-production from the man behind IFD Films, Godfrey Ho, credited here as Godfrey Hall. This Action Star Picture production starts in Hong Kong, where FBI agent Tracy Pride (Rothrock) is just about to leave for America. I don't think they ever visited Hong Kong for this version?, with just a brief clip taken from some stock footage, to establish the location. In fact, the movie could have worked just as well without this opening segment. The blond kicking bomb Cynthia Rothrock has a very brief but nicely staged scuffle with her boyfriend and fellow agent Dragon Lee. Fans of the Bruceploitation genre will find that name amusing, Dragon is played by none of than the talented Robin Shou (Mortal Combat). Neither Shou nor Rothrock are the lead stars, the movie is more of an ensemble piece really. However with two ass kicking ladies taking up most of the movie's run time, I felt it was still suited to this month's mutual reviews theme.



The story quickly jumps to Washington D.C, where Joyce Pride is just finishing a news report. Only this is rudely interrupted by a woman armed with a can of Dr Pepper, who's no fan of Joyce's reporting style. Joyce shrugs off the insults and walks away, while the angered lady launches her can of fizzy sugar at the reporter. This being a Godfrey Ho production, means everyone in the film knows Martial Arts. Despite having her back turned, Miss Pride neatly kicks the can back, hitting her foe right on the forehead. This is followed by another brief but well put together fight. Actress Donna Jason, didn't have any formal Martial Arts training as far as I know?. This actress only appeared in a handful of films during her short career. But she handles the fight scenes quite well, for someone who didn't have a lot of screen combat experience. IMDB also have her listed as this-movie's assistant director. Hollywood's recently been catching up, in terms of putting strong female leads in their action films. It seems Godfrey Ho was well ahead of the game, when he came up with this story about a Kung Fu studying, American female news Reporter.

You can see that Godfrey Ho was aiming this movie more at the U.S market, not just in terms of the actors. The fight are also tighter and shorter in run time. Compared with the one's you often see in his Hong Kong work, such as The Dragon The Hero. That said, there's still some really nice Hong Kong style action in display here. Despite being filmed in the U.S, with a mostly American cast, it still has that late 80's early 90s Hong Kong atmosphere to it. The slick fight choreography was put together by Tai Yim, who also just happens to play Joyce Pride's Sifu. Not sure if he taught her how to answer the phone, only using a Staff, while simultaneously sitting in a hammock?. It's Tai Yim's Kung Fu School that also appears in the movie, with his name adorning some of the banners in the background, in some shots. I have to really give this man some credit, because this is his only and only attempt at fight choreography, and he really nails the Hong Kong approach of the era. The sequence where the two sisters, have a brief fight over a pair of car keys, wouldn't look out of place in a Sammo Hung movie. I'm sure some of the cast and stunt crew will have had some influence on the action too.

*"You chase the Honor, I chase the Glory"*

Ace Martial Artist/stuntman/actor Chuck Jeffreys, puts on a fine physical performance as Jason Slade's swift kicking bodyguard, Jake Armstrong. Jeffreys has had an interest in the Arts since the age of eight, he's studied many styles including Shaolin Long Fist, Indonesian Pentjak Silat, and Nan Chuan to name just a few. He's also noted to be a skilled with weapons, training Wesley Snipes for his swordplay in Blade, as well as choreographing some of the fight scenes too. Jeffreys continues to find work in film, working as a stuntman on The Equalizer and Falcon Rising, and more recently The Marvel show Jessica Jones. He made his screen debut in the Leon Fong directed Cynthia Rothrock actioner, *Fight To Win* (1985). Like I mentioned earlier, this movie doesn't give any one performer major screen time, with the exception of the leading lady Donna Jason. However, Chuck still gets to show off his skills in a number of fights. The first time he gets to let loose, he performs an impressive flying kick on some two guys who attempt to kill Slade.

Like I mentioned earlier, this film doesn't really have a main star. Despite the cover art often misleadingly selling the movie as a Cynthia Rothrock vehicle. That said, the American born Martial Arts sensation still gets plenty of screen time, to show off her trademark kicks. The original Atomic Blond, has studied two Korean Martial Arts, in the form of Tang Soo Do and Tae Kwon Do, so it's no surprise she has such impressive skills with her legs. Not mention studying Northern Shaolin Kung Fu, Wu Shu and Eagle Claw. Still, *Honor and Glory* is not her greatest Martial showcase, with each performer's having to share their screen time, rather than being the star. Rothrock and Robin Shou have a good dust-up with some bodyguards next to a red sports car. With the Lady Dragon decked out in knee high boots, a green turtle neck jumper and turquoise leather jacket. The fight is a good example of how accurate and powerful, her sweet screen kicks look.

*"He just bought you some time old man, but when their done, were gonna barbecue you out back" -Jason Slade*

One performance that really stands out, is that of Martial Artist/Bodybuilder John Miller. Who played Cynthia Rothrock's partner, in the Godfrey Ho directed *Undefeatable*, made the same year. Here he's so over the top, he steals almost every scene he appears in. The muscle mad Banker, executes a solid Spear kata, showing that Miller had legitimate skills off screen. Something you had to possess, if you were going to be in a Martial Arts movie from this era. The character Jason Slade, has to be one of the most Invincible screen villains, since Carter Wong's role in *Born Invincible*. He can break chains with his bare hands, and stub out large cigars in his palms. The strange Kata he performs whilst wearing multiple iron wrist rings, must really have enhanced his strength levels. Yet he still feels the need to be surrounded by bodyguards, go figure. On a more serious note, Miller, like the rest of the cast, really did a fine job of re-creating the Hong Kong choreography of the time. Which makes me wonder why he didn't get more film work?.

*"Silk, do you know the difference between a Bulgarian dildo and a nuclear trigger?, because I don't" - Jason Slade*

It's the ten minute warehouse brawl finale, where everyone really gets to let loose with their skills set. Slade tells his goons they can't use guns, due to the explosive being stored in the warehouse, not to mention boats and other random things. It's a nice way of explaining why the bodyguards don't just use their firearms to stop our heroes. If I have one minor gripe about the end fight. It's the fact there appears that the heroes outnumber the villains. Or maybe Jason Slade having the physical strength of ten men, evens things up?. We get treated to multiple fights taking place simultaneously. Robin Shou goes head to head with Japanese assassin Richard Yuen, they hint at the two characters having a past. Which you don't see in this U.S. print of the film, Ho released a different version in Hong Kong, called *Angel The Kickboxer*. Which featured addition of Yukari Oshima and more of Robin Shou's character, that version also runs about ten minutes longer. The Hong Kong action was directed by Ridley Tsui Bo-Wah, none of his work is present in this International cut of movie, that I know of?. Getting back to the finale, one highlight see's Robin Shou run up a steel girder, and execute a spectacular kick on Yuen.

Meanwhile Jake Armstrong (Chuck Jeffreys) is pulling off some moves of his own. Including a nice Wu Shu style flip of a stack of wooden pallets. You can see why Warehouses were a popular place for Martial Arts film locations, there's always an abundance of items to implement in the fights. During one of the encounters, a Pepsi vending machine can clearly be seen in the background. When Richard Yuen's stunt double gets launched at said machine, the words Pepsi have been clearly gaffer taped over. Cynthia Rothrock demonstrates some great looking staff work, when she flicks a steel bar off the floor with her foot, and catches it with her hand. It takes all of four people, the arrival of the local Police Force, and a large net. Just to stop the lunatic money man Slade.

*"Ok Silk, I've heard your pretty good, but to get to the door, you gotta get through me"*

*Honor And Glory* is no masterpiece, this is a Godfrey Ho movie after all. The story is very weak, and to say the acting is over the top, is an understatement. Most of the production appears to be filmed on a lightly populated and expensive housing estate. Yet I'd still say this is one of Ho's better movies, the sexual violence present in the cult movie *Undefeatable*, is absent here. Which is a big plus in my opinion. If you like your U.S. Martial Arts actioners to have some Hong Kong flavour, then you will want to check this one out. Just keep your expectations in check, and just don't expect big budget productions values. (by DragonClaws of KFF)

**Hot War (Hong Kong, 1998: Jingle Ma)** - Blue, Tango and C.S. are CIA research scientists working on Project VR Fighter which is designed to train unskilled person (sic.) into magnificent combat agent. Tango and C.S. decide to undergo the training themselves, because Alien, the international terrorist, has killed C.S.'s fiancée and kidnapped Blue for his conspiracy. Alien is finally destroyed, however, the side effects of Project VR Fighter lead to the war between the two friends...

Now that's interesting (no sarcasm). Project VR Fighter is a plot that can open to, uh, around six billion doors, maybe four of which are bad ones. One of the bad ones makes a movie that is just a love story. Another door makes it into a drama about friends. Another brings us to sleazy action with lots of fast cuts and a camera that forgot to take its Ritalin. And the other bad door is a combination of the other 3. The other six billion minus four lead to the possibility that a person goes into this VR unit, learns different styles, and fights with those styles, many of which are defined and called out, and yet another way to do it is to learn JUST ONE STYLE, and have competing styles... I'm talking out of a sour mouth right now, but I'll just say up front that this movie chose the 4th bad door (the other 3 doors combined). Let me explain.

Skip the story ahead to about the 25 minute mark and the 2 guys (C.S. and Tango) start learning their fighting skills, which are all undefined. What you see first is a computer image of Tango with another guy who seems to be much faster and more agile, and all Tango does is do some real world moves on him. Knockdown, he gets back up and attacks again. It's like they're being trained for each movement. Well, the stuff is completely undercranked. Don't try and make me believe that what I'm seeing is regular speed. Secondly, Tango does the same stuff to the guy over and over, so yea I kept an eye on exactly what was happening and what moves the other guy was doing, and they just repeat and get more and more undercranked. Then C.S. does the same thing, and it's just some more moves that he suppresses. Sure, they look as though they can actually be done, except for a few where they totally fling the completely yielding opponent off to the side by grabbing his leg or something, but so far this wasn't fight choreography to me and I didn't see anything that could relate later on. And then they have a first person boxing match with multiple opponents, and you can't really see much except for some wireframe stuff.

C.S. and Tango get into a gunfight in an office building about 10 minutes down the road, big deal. Some moves thrown in here and there, like Tango throwing a guy onto the ground and kicking him (hmm...). C.S. takes a guy's arm and holds it and hits him in the stomach and renders him useless, which seems a little unrealistic, almost to the point of *The Matrix*. He also clotheslines a guy. Alien, who I assumed was THE formidable foe, runs off.

C.S. is on a little wooden thingie in the bay and some jet skis are going all over the place, and so is the camera. He shoots at some of them, the cuts are like every 2 seconds, and then a woman runs her jet ski up onto the thingie (DOCK, it's a dock!) dock and he clotheslines her and she lands on the dock, a setup for a fight, and cut to the next scene... what? Well it comes back 2 minutes later as a flashback, and here's what happens. Sweep (can't see it), jump, drop, closeup on a smiling, no-talent chick throwing 2 punches, side shot with C.S. blocking twice, shot of him doing an ugly kick, she elbows him (closeup, looks like an LSD flashback), 3 punches badly thrown (a different closeup), he grabs her arm (shaky camera, closeup again), grabs her hair (yet another closeup), and she falls down as though he's throwing her and he spins afterwards (a shaky shot), and then he stabs her. Stupid. Why bother? No sound effects either, since it's a flashback.

So C.S. is in trouble, and in an airport terminal he gets in a fight with some CIA guys, and all they do is brawl, while Tango is handcuffed to a chair that was never bolted to the ground the way it should have been, so he picks it up. All of it is done to some ballad music with some wimpy sound effects, and you can't hear ONE guy do some kind of yell or anything. A weak performance. Later C.S. and Tango fight in an abandoned orphanage, and they exchange some, um, holds, and they punch through a glass pained door at eachother, do another hold that is basically lost due to shit camera work yet again, and C.S. runs off. They meet up again and after about 20 cuts there have been maybe 6 moves. Then it's over.

The last fight is painfully long. First, a shootout in some kind of camera station that is totally cramped and badly suited for the action that takes place. Then Alien, some Chinese guy with blonde hair (they show him with short black hair and he looks so much more respectable, I wonder why he did something like that), comes and shows C.S. what real fighting is, supposedly. He puts him in a headlock for a long time (great), and he does moves that are supposed to be real and are supposed to work, but all they do is have him do something within like 2% of the actual move, cut, and then show the second half as a closeup. Some decent choreography comes after Tango comes in, but it's ruined again by way too many cuts and camera angles that make it look like a wrestling match. Plus, Alien looks to be faking everything he does. It's not impressive. Alien and C.S. end up near a swimming pool on the top of a skyscraper (they used some flying machines like what Jackie used in *Armour of God 2*), and brawl with no good choreography to speak of. Alien falls off the top to his death. The end.

So I learned something VERY valuable from this movie. Here's what happened. In the beginning, it was getting hyped up to be about smart fighting and precision gunplay, the latter I don't and didn't care about but I could manage watching it. It had lots of choreography (a whole 30 seconds or so) in the beginning that was totally absent from the content later on, so what I was looking for was something that they basically promised me, yet I didn't receive it. Instead what I got was stuff that wasn't really introduced in the beginning, and this didn't seem to comply with the rules that the movie had already set aside. Bad BAD camera angles, music that drove me nuts, not enough sound from the characters, everything was blue for some reason, as though they were trying to set some kind of mood which clearly didn't help, there were these annoying nuances by the editor like fading into cuts during dialog, or the shaky camera used almost all the time like they used in *Gladiator* or *Saving Private Ryan*, which only promotes sickness and not realism because when I'm in some kind of danger, I don't see things like that, in fact I doubt anyone does. And too many cuts, dammit. They need to lighten up... but they won't, of course. "This is the next generation, guys, and we need to make it more intense!" Yea, well take that intense and stick it up your @\$\$! (by Eric Jacobus of the Stunt People)

**How to Meet the Lucky Stars (Hong Kong, 1996: Frankie Chan)** - The Lucky Stars return again to win a gambling competition in order to help a girl regain her lost money.

Grr, what rubbish. I admit, under the right conditions the lucky stars can be pretty goofy, but this is ridiculous. Some scenes are ok, but you can get these "tricky" gambling scenes in any gambling film. Anyways, action in this is so sparse and isn't even all that good. One would think that with Sammo Hung and a monk (name coming) fighting Mark Houghton and Kim Marie Penn, some great action could come of it but no. It's basically rubbish and this film ends up being yet ANOTHER cameo flick meant to bring in a thousand HK stars and put them in a random spots. And the corniness of this movie is unbearable. There's a scene where the monk is kicked in the groin to prove how strong he is and they bring up foreigners to do it, who make a mess of themselves and act like fools. Can't stand this.

Anyways I better prove my point. The first action scene comes WAY late into the movie when the monk enters a hideout with a few others and fights 2 women. In total, I doubt there's more than a half minute of real fighting here because each cut is interspersed with the lucky stars goofing around with money. The fight with the women is ok but sloppy at times, one cut is good which is just handwork. Kim and Mark enter and the fighting gets sloppy. Mark

is unusually slow, and actually the monk seems to be nothing more than someone who can hop around and throw some chest-level kicks. Nothing spectacular at all and the fighting is embarrassing. Kim barely fights.

After a long and tiresome gambling scene that goes on for over 20 minutes, the monk enters the commotion and fights Mark and Kim again. Mark is faster this time but seems way too fake, throwing as many moves as possible without making them look real. Kim's fighting is weird because it's more of a 2 on 1 and when she's working the monk, she'll throw a punch, keep it there forever until Mark kicks him. Mark's doubled for falls too. Meanwhile, the lead female fights against a group. I can't help but feel this was a COMPLETE waste. Guess who's in the group? Benny Lai! He throws about 2 kicks from out of the screen and runs away. Another guy from Jackie's stunt team (old dude) fights and does a backfall. The rest is folly. Cut back to the monk fighting Kim swinging a dividing cord around and Mark using what looks like the stand that connects the cord. Bad editing, no, TERRIBLE editing. Mark beats the monk with the stand, cut, Mark standing, cut, Mark kicks him in the balls, cut, same cut of Mark standing... what? And the camera switches sides in the middle of the fight. Grr, terrible.

The highlight of the entire movie is Sammo beating up on the goons in the parking lot. Great stunts and as a fight it's spectacular, but it's about 9 seconds long. The women from earlier take falls onto and INTO cars (Sammo swings one by the legs into the side of a car), and Sammo's also able to chain punches with kicks quite nicely. Then Sammo fights the lead female villain who is so awful, she's doubled for everything which makes the choreography stupid looking (arms coming in from the side, etc). When she's not doubled I want to punch a hole in the screen. The fight ends with her shooting at Sammo and the lucky stars and blah, done.

I hated this movie actually. I never cracked a smile and the gambling tricks introduced in the beginning were cool for about 30 seconds until they used them a thousand times over. You can go to a casino and enjoy it more there. Action, bad, bleh, only scene worthwhile was Sammo's at the end against the group. The other scenes were piss poor and I don't know what was up with Mark and Kim, Mark was awesome in *Skinny Fatty* and here he's a slug trying to dance. Call me biased but it seems like Sammo always saves these trashy movies from being complete duds. He doesn't even have a f\*cking character in it and he's just a cameo, obviously the director had the brains to realize that the people available weren't enough and just threw Sammo in to pepper it up. Sadly the movie still sucked and just made my day worse! (by Eric Jacobus of the Stunt People)

**Hunted Hunter, The (Philippines, 1997: Ricky Lau)** - During the 90's, it was considered an unspoken rule that the Philippines was the place where the careers of Hong Kong action stars go to die. Philip Ko Fei, Cynthia Khan, and Yukari Oshima all made several movies there, with Yukari Oshima even going so far as to adopt a new Filipino stage name – Cynthia Luster. Few who made a movie in the Philippines ever made it back to Hong Kong to recapture their former glory, with perhaps the exception of Donnie Yen, who after making *High Voltage* in 1994, went on to become the most bankable action star in China. That's some turnaround. Yuen Biao wasn't quite so lucky, and 'Hunted Hunter' could in many ways be considered the last movie that cast him as the headlining star, and yes it's made in the Philippines.

At the helm is director Ricky Lau, here teaming up with Biao for a second time, having previously made *Mr. Vampire 2* together 12 years prior. Lau directed all of the 'Mr. Vampire' movies, along with several other supernatural themed kung-fu flicks, such as 'Where's Officer Tuba?', 'Encounters of the Spooky Kind 2', and 'Ghost Punting', all of which starred Sammo Hung. Much like Biao, a look at Lau's filmography post-1997 shows hardly any titles of note, a sign of both their careers being on a downward spiral at the time.

It's worth mentioning that Biao himself had already worked in the Philippines at this point, having made 'Tough Beauty and the Sloppy Slop' (alongside the previously mentioned Cynthia Khan) a couple of years earlier. However 'Hunted Hunter' seems to be an even lower budget production, with the look and feel being the very definition of 'cheap'. The language issues don't help, with the audio transitioning awkwardly between Mandarin (note: the original Chinese audio is Cantonese, however the only DVD release is Mandarin only) and heavily accented Filipino English. If you thought the gwai lo performances found in many an 80's Hong Kong movie were bad, what's on display here makes them look almost Oscar worthy in comparison.

The plot itself is essentially a rehash of 'The Fugitive', with Biao playing the head of security for a corporate building (which I guess makes him a hunter?) that discovers the murdered body of a female office worker. After the murderer escapes, leaving Biao as the only person in the building, he's found guilty of murder and sentenced to death. Cue the entrance of a pair of Filipino cops, played by locally popular Filipino action star Roi Vinzon, and an incredibly annoying Karen Timbol. Vinzon and Timbol are clearly speaking English, but they bizarrely seem to have been over dubbed in heavily accented Chinese English.

Things get stranger once the action moves to Hong Kong, where they're accompanied by a translator, but then without any explanation begin speaking perfect Chinese. There's logic in there somewhere, as it becomes clear that the person dubbing them in English, is now the same person dubbing them in Chinese. It's amazing that the one piece of coherency the filmmakers seemed to pay any attention to was the voices of the two Filipino actors. Most humorously though, is that the move back to Hong Kong is quite clearly just Chinatown in Manila. Even for a viewer who has never been to Hong Kong or Manila, I somehow doubt many people would mistake the filming locations for Hong Kong, but it's a commendable attempt at some globe trotting.

Really though, with almost any Yuen Biao movie, we're checking in for the action. 'Hunted Hunter' has it, although the quality of it varies greatly, most of which I'd hesitate to add is no fault of Biao's himself, nor choreographer Yuen Bo. The plot moves along quickly, and a little over 10 minutes in Biao launches an exciting escape attempt from prison, while being pursued by several guards. It's surprisingly violent, with Biao at one point wielding a police baton in each hand and putting the beat down on one of the guards, as well as unleashing with a shotgun.

However a number of his other action sequences are frustratingly filmed using the step-printing technique that was so popular in the mid-90's. For those unfamiliar, it's a technique which basically makes the image move in a kind of blurred semi-slow motion. In short, not the best technique for filming action. Mid-way through Biao has a chase sequence up against multiple attackers in a shopping mall, that contains a great stunt in which he literally jumps from one floor of the mall to the other. Later on he also faces off one-on-one against a knife wielding Michael Lam, however both of these sequences are filmed using the technique, which seriously impairs the impact and sense of movement the action should deliver.

What's more frustrating is that at one point Roi Vinzon storms into a drug lab, and single handedly throws down against the melee of workers inside – and it's filmed perfectly, with some nice angles to capture the impact. So the internationally unknown Filipino star has his fight scene competently filmed, but one of the greatest physical talents to ever grace the screen has his action obscured by blurred frame rates. It's not all bad though, despite being shot at night there's a great stunt that sees Biao jump out of a 5th floor window, and there's a rooftop chase sequence which is filmed well, despite the landing mats being in plain view in a couple of shots. Vinzon and Biao also get a chance to have a one on one fight, which is free of any slow motion, and it contains some good impacts.

Outside of the action, there's some notable Hong Kong talent surrounding Biao. Wu Ma shows up as a pony tail sporting bad guy (perhaps inspired by Vinzon, who also sports one), and Jessica Suen plays Biao's estranged wife who does her best to help him out. Zhang Feng Yi plays the HK cop on Biao's trail in 'Hong Kong', and Chung Fat turns up as one of Ma's henchmen. The bad guys in 'Hunted Hunter' definitely earn their villain status, as there's a couple of scenes when things get particularly nasty. One scene has Michael Lam beating the living daylights out of Jessica Suen, which culminates in him pushing a needle down one of her finger nails, and another scene has Biao having a live drill being pushed into his mouth.

Thankfully both Biao and Suen survive their respective ordeals, and 'Hunted Hunter' culminates in what's ultimately an entertaining 15 minute finale. Most of it consists of what can only be classed as an equally epic and hilarious shootout. The cops storm the ship where the bad guys are hiding out, and unleash a never ending stream of bullets, into an endlessly regenerating stream of identically suited lackeys. It's completely goofy, however the kinetic energy of it makes the complete lack of logic behind it forgivable. At the same time Biao takes on both Chung Fat and Levy Ignacio, before the fight segues into a 2 on 2 once Vinzon joins in, with Biao left to take on Ignacio and Vinzon against Fat. The fight is thankfully free of any camera trickery, and contains plenty of collateral damage in the form of broken tables and boxes. It's a worthy enough final showdown, although not one that anybody is likely to mistake for Biao's best work.

In the same year as 'Hunted Hunter' Biao would also star as a villain in the Shaw Brothers movie 'Hero', a role which he's fondly remembered for. Put side by side, the 2 movies look like they're from completely different eras, and while both have Biao showing that physically he still had it, increasingly there seemed to be a shortage of movies that could be tailored to show them off. On the bright side, with a recent resurgence in the Filipino film industry, it's no longer considered to be the place where HK action stars go when the offers have dried up locally, it's just a shame that the same resurgence can't be applied to Biao's career. (by Paul Bramhall)

**Iceman Cometh, The (Hong Kong, 1989: Clarence Ford)** - Wanting to check out more of Yuen Biao's catalog, I heard about this movie and how it was underrated. After seeing it, I am a little confused about it being underrated but different strokes for different folks!

Plotwise, this movie is solid if not exactly original. A Ming Royal Guard hunts down one of his comrades (Yuen Wah) who has gone crazy raping and killing women. Yuen attempts to harness the power of the Black Jade Buddha to avoid capture but winds up being chased to a snowy location where they battle and fall off a cliff and freeze (although they hit the cliff a few times on the way down for good measure). 300 years later, a scientific team, doing God knows what, accidentally finds them and carves them out of the ice with lasers (+1 bonus points!) but they are accidentally thawed by some bumbling crooks and they escape into modern Hong Kong (circa 1989). Biao runs into Maggie Cheung, a hooker who uses his naivete and super-human skills to her advantage, including cleaning her house, cooking her food, and generally berating him at any given moment; it's really touching!

Needless to say, Yuen Wah also has found his way around HK as a mercenary thug with a look that can have only existed in the 80's. His outfit was one of the highlights of the movie for me- he looks FOB with a Micheal Jackson Thriller video setup complete with denim vest, skinny tie, those round, black shades and high top sneakers! And a mullet!! This has the unfortunate effect of making Wah not so badass but that's not the movie's main problem.

Wah continues killing women and eventually \*\*\*SPOILER\*\*\* finds Maggie Cheung and uses her as a pawn in his fight with Biao\*\*\*\*SPOILER END\*\*\*\*. To go on from here would reveal the ending, plus it's pretty hard not to guess what happens from this point. Will Biao capture or kill Wah? Will he ever get back to his own time? Does Maggie Cheung ever stop abusing him? Seriously, women in New York pay top dollar for that kind of man-slave!

The action is good- in fact, it's quite good in places. Biao doesn't show any slippage in his acrobatic skills and throws some mean kicks here. His style is quite clean, fluid, and fast, and I now have confirmed (for me) that he is probably the most physically gifted out of the Seven Fortunes. Wah, also one of the Fortunes, is toe to toe with Biao in their fights, matching his agility with amazing responsiveness. The fights flow well and also have some pretty visceral hits in them. Throw in some good swordwork by both and actionwise, this movie is pretty good. Not fabulous, but pretty damn good.

However, it is doled out sparingly to make room for the interaction between Maggie and Biao. While their pairing had some chemistry, it wears thin after a bit, especially as all it seems Maggie does is heap verbal abuse on Biao and take advantage of him. In fact, she never shows the slightest interest in doing anything but, so when the final pieces of the story unwind, it is a little hard to swallow. I also find it hard to believe that she is a prostitute with as much as she connives her way out of it, especially when Biao shows up. I began to think that her real job was playing mah jong with her hooker friends! Maggie is cute but she just falls short of carrying this part of the film, which felt one-dimensional to me anyways. Some things worked- the scene where she brings Biao home is funny and you feel for Biao, who realizes just how far away he is from his place. Biao seems to have some acting chops and holds his own in this movie.

Other parts of the story felt uneven, especially as it seems some effort was made to use locations (mountains, city) and setpieces (large giant Freedom Wheel, special effects). They could have bolstered the backstory between Biao and Wah some more, especially as they are the main antagonists. Maybe some flashbacks to their arduous training? Or some more footage of them in the Ming period? Either way, even some judicious editing could have improved this film more. You get the basics of the story well enough but then it just falls apart, especially when it doesn't focus on Biao or Wah.

So, to sum it up: Good action, and serviceable plot with a good performance by Biao, but the movie overall was just too long. They tried to combine a romantic-comedy and action-thriller with some success but it still feels half-baked. I think watching Biao and Wah fight is a good reason to get this movie but it makes you feel like they could have had a real solid movie with all those elements they tried to incorporate. And so it goes into the mediocrity bin, where it will be frozen with all the other 80's action thrillers until some future time when people when unthaw it and go "Hey! Yuen Biao! Wasn't he great in *Prodigal Son*?" (by CrazyFrog of KFF)

**In the Heat of Summer (Hong Kong, 1994: Teddy Chan)** - In 1994, the very prolific -- 32 scriptwriting credits between 1989 and 2001 (including for "A Moment of Romance", "Always On My Mind", "He's a Woman, She's a Man", "The Wedding Days" and "Clean My Name, Mr. Coroner!") and a few directing ones too -- James Yuen and director Teddy Chan (who has gone on to helm "Downtown Torpedoes", "Purple Storm" and "The Accidental Spy") collaborated on two movies that had Jordan and Moses Chan in their cast. Whereas "Twenty Something" has got a reputation (for being the rare U.F.O. drama given a Category III rating, if nothing else), this crime drama -- whose set of stories shows members of the police force as all too human individuals who lead rather ordinary lives in between being called upon to risk their lives in the line of duty -- is one that seems to have been too low-key to have made much of an impact.

IN THE HEAT OF SUMMER also is one of those films that doesn't exactly start off with a bang. In fact, I think it's been a while since I saw an introductory sequence that was as bemusing and ineffective -- not just mediocre -- as this one which involves a car full of casual acting fellows, with monikers like "Monk" and "Daddy" as well as Tak and Kong, who do not get immediately revealed to be plain-clothes policemen. In all honesty though, I do think that this offering does improve as it goes along. Indeed, starting from when the four unassuming looking detectives (who come in the forms of Jordan Chan, Chan Kwok Bong, Marco Ngai and Joe Cheung) actually spring into action, but especially after the entrance of a rookie detective named Sam Hui (who is played by Moses Chan) into the picture, one is presented with better clues re why it is that Paul Fonoroff was moved to describe it as "one of the best cops-and-robber movies in recent years" and "all in all an admirable effort" (See his "At the Movies", 1998:445).

Nonetheless, despite IN THE HEAT OF SUMMER having not one but three action directors (who include Chin Kar Lok and Bruce Law), its action sequences aren't really as spectacular as one might expect of a work whose protagonists find themselves having to deal with a disgruntled army sergeant turned bomb terrorist (portrayed by Jack Kao) as well as a murderous gang of jewelry store thieves (headed by Michael Lam). Alternatively, when it is realized that significant time is devoted to showing that "Everyone has his problem" and precisely what problem each one of the younger detectives in Sergeant Yiu Kin Kong's team is saddled with, it ought to be apparent that this effort is more of an action-oriented drama than an actioner with unusual dramatic depth.

To a certain degree, I do think that the Chinese title effectively translates into English as "Young Police Detectives" deserves some credit for its attempt to be more character than action driven. However, my feeling is that the wrong characters were picked to be the film's main ones. More specifically, Jordan Chan's Monk -- so nicknamed because of his choice of close shaven hair style -- is the kind of mouthy character with the heart of gold that may have been interesting in as of itself but has become too familiar a fixture of Hong Kong movies to intrigue me all that much when encountered in IN THE HEAT OF SUMMER while Marco Ngai's Tak -- who is a gambling addict who is heavily in debt -- was -- at least initially -- too prickly in his interactions with his colleagues and clumsy with his attempts to show affection for his hostess girlfriend to come across all that well.

The banal plus stock nature of these two characters is particularly obvious when juxtaposed with that of Chan Kwok Bong's "Daddy": Another twenty-something year old policeman, but one who is a single parent to a troubled son who ultimately only yearns to be loved by his father. IN THE HEAT OF SUMMER's standout character though is Jack Kao's (ex-)army sergeant Chan Wei Cheng. It is an uncommon crime film that takes pains to show, as this one does, that its main villain was much less of an unfeeling monster of a mad bomber than an angry man whose buttons got pushed because he was a loyal friend, loving father and the sort of husband who takes to heart a lecture delivered by his wife (who's played by Christine Ng). If only this police drama's crime-fighting heroes had been as sympathetically plus complexly rendered. In large part because they weren't, I find myself in the unusual position of being unwilling to bestow as much praise on a contemporary Hong Kong production as the infamously hypercritical Mr. Fonoroff! (by YTSL of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**In the Line of Duty (Hong Kong, 1986: David Chung) -- aka Royal Warriors** - Michelle Yip (MY) is a HK police detective, Michael Wong (MW) is an air marshal, and Peter Yamamoto (HS) is a Japanese police detective. The three are aboard a plane when a hijacker attempts to release a prisoner being guarded for extradition. They prevent the criminals from succeeding and kill them in the process. The hijacker and prisoner are members of a former squad of soldiers who in war time swore their loyalty to one another to the death. Now the other two are after Michelle, Michael, and Yamamoto to avenge the deaths of their comrades.

Fight #1 --- Michelle vs 2 thugs with knives - Not a bad 1st fight. Yeoh shows her dexterity as a kicker and even makes use of a *shinai* (bamboo practice sword used in kendo) to showcase some Chinese sword play. There's some acrobatic bits for which she's obviously doubled, but it doesn't detract from the fight sequences. She does perform a cool scissor leg lock on 1 dude's knife hand.

Fight #2 --- Michelle & Yamamoto vs hijacker (HYK) and prisoner (WMC) - Takes place on an airplane. Good fights! MY and HS tag-team WMC. There's some really good kicks here, especially from Sanada. Actually, there are good exchanges all around. MY fights HYK on her own and makes good use of a fire extinguisher against his knife. She takes some pretty hard falls, too. These are some good hard-hitting fights.

Fight #3 --- Michelle & Yamamoto vs the hitman (KKC) - Yamamoto's wife and daughter are killed in a car bombing meant for him. A chase ensues. Sanada and KKC have a good go in an alley but it's short. Later, on a construction site as Yamamoto is buried under a pile of dirt, MY and KKC have at each other in the cab of a front-end loader but again the fight is short. Still, though the bouts are brief, they have good exchanges in them.

Fight #4 --- Yamamoto vs 5 gangsters - Occurs at a shipyard. Again Sanada demonstrates what a great kicker he is. One axe kick in particular was pretty sweet. It's a hard-hitting fight with a good flow, but it's short.

Fight #5 --- Michelle & Yamamoto vs the hitman (KKC) again - Happens at a club. Great fight! There's a big shootout that turns into a 2-on-1. Sanada will not be denied with more good kicks. Yeoh gets her licks in, too, and executes a flying scissor leg takedown that flips KKC into a wall.

Fight #6 --- Michelle vs former squad leader (YB) - Takes place at a quarry. Brutal end fight! It's not much of a scrap really. YB utilizes a chainsaw and MY takes a few rough falls. But she ends it by unloading a few sweet kicks on the guy.

I love Michelle Yeoh and this is a good B-actioner. (The clothing styles will make you smile.) She has her moments but very few of her fight sequences have any really standout moves.

I'm most impressed with Hiroyuki Sanada in this. His fights are the best but they are short, and he doesn't even get in on the end fight. Shame. He really should've had one of his own. (I need to find more of his films. Some of his others that I've seen don't really have him performing much action in them. Actually, this is the only film he's ever really impressed me in.)

Michael Wong is useless in this. He performs no MA in this whatsoever. (He's not a martial artist anyway. Just as well.) His character is annoying and he's wimpy. He's just eye candy for the ladies, I guess.

The plot is interesting but it's not really fleshed out. Shoot, some of the characters don't even have names. The fights are good and flow very well. The acting is hammy from everyone except MY and HS. They definitely had on-screen chemistry. Wish they would've followed this with another film together.

I'd encourage you to check this out. It's a good modern actioner and you'll enjoy Yeoh and Sanada in this. **Get it!** (by Scott Blasingame)

**In the Line of Duty III (Hong Kong, 1988: Arthur Wong, Brandy Yuen)** - In many ways, *In The Line Of Duty III* closely resembles its popular predecessor, *Royal Warriors*. Both films involve a Japanese policeman partnering up with a female Hong Kong cop. In both films, the heroes conduct themselves according to a strict idea of allegiance to the law, family, and each other. Both films are brutal in their depictions of violence as a way of life.

ITLOD III sets itself apart in the way that the characters are fully-developed people. The viewer can feel their pain and see their hatred culminate to a steady boil. The bad guys in this one are played by Stuart Ong and Nishiwaki Michiko (soon I will be able to spell that one without reading the DVD case), as violent terrorist lovers who knock over a jewelry exhibition with spooky efficiency and a knack for making living people dead ones. They escape the show unharmed but are chased by two Tokyo cops, one a rookie and one the teacher (Hiroshi Fujioka). In a completely harrowing scenario, the young cop is killed while clutched in the older cop's arms. Fujioka vows vengeance and heads to Hong Kong to confront the killers and honor his partner's death.

Cynthia Khan's character, Madam Yeung, is really the same character Michelle Yeoh played in *Royal Warriors* and *Yes, Madam*. She is an athletic, but very wooden actress. This time, the filmmakers make her a meter maid at the beginning. Dressed like a stewardess in a navy blue uniform and tight at the knee skirt, she hardly looks like the raging kung fu queen that we expect. Of course, after about three minutes dressed like this, she defiantly rips a two-foot slit up the side of her skirt so she can more efficiently kick a smalltime thief's ass. I assume that her skills shown during this bust prompt officials to promote her to a unit heading by her annoyingly protective uncle, Chun.

Her unit is filled with the usual set of goofballs, people who faint at the sight of blood, and those who reek of comic relief, so that she clearly stands out. The Hong Kong police really take it on the chin in this movie because Madam Yeung is shown as the best cop in the movie and she doesn't ever follow the rules. I would think the real HK police would be greatly insulted.

Hiroshi Fujioka is a new face to me. With his long trench coat and .44 magnum, he has a sort of Clint Eastwood appeal. This guy makes it look effortless. Because I am not familiar with many Japanese films, I'd be interested to know what other films he has been in. Furthermore, his one-on-one fight with Stuart Ong is a masterpiece of brutality. These guys slug it out with pipes, spears, and fists. They beat each other bloody for about 5-10 minutes. Part kung fu. Mostly rage. Definitely one of the most graphic brawls I have seen.



Revenge thrillers are nothing new. They have been done over and over, but it's the simplicity of its form that allows this genre to work. The audience, too, wants its retribution and is inclined to follow along until they get it. ITLOD III piles one revenge scenario on top of the next. Soon, everyone wants to kick some ass and eventually the lure of guns and jewels are simply peripheral.

All this leads up to a series of battles pitting Khan vs. Nishiwaki and Dick Wei. Trust me, the fights involving the women up the ante in terms of intensity. Throw Wei in there and some iron wrenches, an ax, some lead pipes, a belt of explosives and a large power drill and you have one wild, brutal (man I have used that word a lot in this review) free-for-all of a fight.

After watching this film, I was so disorientated that I had to take some aspirin and a nap. (That's a good thing for a kung fu movie fan) (by Reefer of City on Fire)

**In The Line of Duty 4 (Hong Kong, 1989: Yuen Woo-Ping)** - It's always nice to revisit one of the definite wall-to-wall action classics of the 80s. The action plays out nice and everyone gets to show what they are all about. Cynthia, Donnie, M. Woods, J. Salvitti, S. Berwick, Cho Wing. Hell, even M. Wong. I also have to commend the script writers for actually creating a little more creative story this time unlike so many contemporary HK action movies at the time that were using simplified and clichéd story layers obviously for the action to kick in. I really love the idea of the usual "mistaken identity" theme being mixed with the subplot of corrupt CIA agents raising funds for South American rebels by selling drugs and betraying every moral of a cop for the sake of their own cause. It gives the movie a authentic feel to the story involving law enforcers/national security agents, criminals; the different sides of the law. However, as much as I want to praise the movie I have to point that Woo Ping's direction doesn't help much because there ain't much suspense or captivation in the narrative that engrosses. That's one thing that puts me off in similar movies. Plain, thin, and underdeveloped production values led by dull storytelling as well as text-book acting performances. But I'm willing to forgive that because the story is still creatively interesting and is action-packed, containing some of the most inventive choreography and use of props/vehicles for stunts (the motorcycle chase scene was fire!) by Woo Ping and his crew. **Rating: 7.5/10** (by DiP of KFF)

**In the Line of Duty V: Middle Man (Hong Kong, 1990: Cha Chuen-Yee)** If we talk of the great, long-running series from the Jade Screen, there will be a few films that automatically come to mind. The *Once Upon a Time in China* and *Police Story* films are arguably the most popular and most influential. The former kicked off the 1990s New Wave wire-fu craze and set Jet Li on his way to international stardom whereas the latter continued to cement Jackie Chan's popularity and are considered to be some of the most entertaining stunt-driven, modern action films ever made. Other long-running series include the *God of Gamblers* films, the *Young and Dangerous* movies, the *Aces Go Places* movies, and *The Lucky Stars* films.

In my review of *Blonde Fury*, I spoke of the greatness of the 80s HK action film, a genre of films characterized by incredible fight and stunt-driven action with little (if any) use of wires or camera tricks to make the fighters look good. Actually, the *Police Story* and *Lucky Stars* movies are part of this genre and stand as good examples of ingenious fight direction that made these movies so distinguished. But if we are not careful, we might miss a certain series that is just as influential as its contemporaries and, in terms of entries, is up there with the *OUATIC* as having the most entries. The series of which I speak is the *In the Line of Duty* series, which began in 1985 and continued until about 1991.

The first movie made in this series was *Yes Madam*, a movie made great by the fact that it kicked off both Michelle Yeoh's AND Cynthia Rothrock's careers, has one of the best action climaxes ever filmed, and, for all our purposes, kicked off the "girls n' guns" sub-genre of HK action films. It also introduced "Inspector Yeung" to the Jade Screen, who'd make six more official appearances and probably several other "unofficial" appearances in low-budget movies. The next film in the series was *Royal Warriors*, which also starred Michelle Yeoh and also is considered a classic movie.

After the first two movies, the series switched leading actresses after Michelle Yeoh went into (temporary) retirement. Replacing Michelle Yeoh was Taiwanese-born Yang Liqing, who was quickly redubbed "Cynthia Khan," in order to cash in on the popularity of Cynthia Rothrock and Michelle Yeoh, who had been known as Michelle Khan in first movies. Like Michelle Yeoh, Cynthia was a dancer-turned action actress. However, unlike Michelle, Cynthia had already studied martial arts with her father when she was young, but as she got older, she began to study and focus on dancing. She was majoring in dance when she was approached for a role in *In the Line of the Duty 3* (ITLOD from

here on out) as Inspector Yeung, the character made popular by Michelle Yeoh.

She accepted the role, and *ITLOD 3* went on to become an exploitation classic, a favorite among fans of the Jade Screen and female action cinema. I have not seen the movie myself, but I'm under the understanding that it is violent, brutal, and hardcore in all respects. I guess it made enough money to merit another series entry, because one year later, *ITLOD 4* was released. Directed by Yuen Woo-Ping and co-starring Donnie Yen, two of the Yuen brothers, and of course, Cynthia, this film also is considered a classic action movie due to its non-stop action and stunt sequences, all of which were high-quality. *ITLOD 4* is my favorite of the series and is my favorite Donnie Yen and Cynthia Khan movie.

A modest success, a fifth movie was made the following year. From this point on, most people believe that the series took a certain dip in quality. How much that dip actually is, is a matter of debate. Most people consider the last three entries of the series to be pretty entertaining action movies, if nothing else. I've only seen the fifth movie, which will be today's review. In all honesty, the movie actually improves on some of the flaws that plagued the first two movies, but more on that later.

The first scene of the movie sets the tone for the rest of the film: nonstop, no-nonsense action. We start off by watching Inspector Yeung (our Cynthia of course) chase a murder suspect in a car garage. At one point, in a moment of sheer filmmaking insanity, Cynthia does a jump kick through the windshield of the guy's car while it's in motion. The sequence then continues to a fight in an alleyway followed by a stunt/fight on the back of a moving truck(!). All in the first five minutes.

In the next scene, two caucasian guys are doing some shady business in an empty stadium. It seems that they're selling military secrets to some other guys, who turn out to be undercover CIA agents. The resulting chase sequence leaves the two agents dead. However, one of the bad guys is then killed in a gangland-style shooting on orders of his superior, a man known as "The General." The other information dealer (Vincent Lyn), we learn, is an American naval officer stationed in Hong Kong (or at least in HK on leave).

Also arriving in Hong Kong on the same ship is David (David Wu), Inspector Yeung's cousin. David makes friends with Alan (the information dealer) and as expected, leads to some complicated situations. You see, Alan works for the General smuggling U.S. military information for the General's organization to sell to whoever is willing to pay for it. Unfortunately, one night Alan and David are at a club getting drunk and hitting on women. Alan gets in a scuffle with some local marijuana pushers and gets killed by accident. All this is seen by one of the General's enforcers.

Thinking that the aforementioned ruffians and David had some knowledge of Alan's traitorous activities, the General puts a hit out on all of them. At the same time, David is arrested by the CIA, who suspect that he is part of the same organization and a spy as well. Davis escapes and soon goes into hiding with May, the last remaining drug dealer.

This accounts for about the first 30 minutes or so of the movie. The rest of movie is made up of various action set-pieces as Inspector Yeung balks at the CIA and does everything in her power (and outside of it, too) to protect David and May from the General's hitmen. As in the last film, Yeung has a really cool superior who's willing to look the other way while she gets the job done in ways that would be probably be illegal, like flying to S. Korea to single-handedly take down the General's organization and stuff.

Like the last entry in the series, *ITLOD 5* is nearly non-stop action. It does have a plot, mind you, although it's not all that important. Well, maybe it is. Who cares? The plot is actually set up better than *ITLOD 4*, which had so much action that the plot could be best described as a bunch of good guys get into almost random fights with the bad guys...not that that bothered me. This movie did a better job of setting up action scenes so as to not appear so random. The pace is kinetic enough that there's never any down time, something that the first two entries were somewhat guilty of. *Yes Madam* started off well, but petered out in the middle when it dedicated its screen time to the supporting comic relief. *Royal Warriors* did the same thing, but in that case, the scenes of Meng Hoi, Tsui Hark, and John Sham were replaced with scenes of Michael Wong (I understand that this makes certain people shudder). While Cynthia Khan does have to share screen time with David Wu and Elvina Wong, the action never flags and Cynthia isn't treated like a supporting character in this one.

The films' treatment of Inspector Yeung is rather interesting. Other than *Royal Warriors*, I've never seen a whole lot of personality in the character. She's likeable and pretty and fun to watch, but for being in 7 movies, I don't think her character was really all that deep. She's the main character, but she's more like a constant. She's a constant

force in her universe: the force which will stand by law and order in all situations...until the end of the movie. By the end of the movie, Inspector Yeung is always taking the law into her own hands. Being a movie, I don't have a problem with that, but that's mostly because it always leads to some really good fight scenes.

Speaking of fight scenes (or action sequences on the whole), there are a lot. The action scenes are varied, which is good since there are a lot. There's a pretty good balance between martial arts/hand-to-hand combat, gunplay, stunt work, and chase scenes. The fight scenes are directed by Chris Lee, whom I'm not familiar with. He does a pretty good with the choreography, although he's definitely not one of the Yuen clan. In addition to some pretty good hand-to-hand combat, Chris mixes things up with some use of objects including shovels, sledge hammers, metal bars (used as escrima sticks), live electrical wires, harpoon guns(!), a cane sword, samurai swords, and even a cobra(!!).

And while not as elaborate as your average Jackie Chan movie or even *Blonde Fury*, there is some environment-based stuntwork. Cynthia and company fight on trucks, throw each other on furniture and through glass, fight around staircases, etc. When the action shifts to some sort of industrial setting, you best believe that the players will be using their surroundings to their advantage.

Cynthia gets involved in about seven set-pieces. Luckily for her (and for her fans), she dominates all of her scenes and doesn't really have to share the action scenes with other protagonists like she did in the last movie. This is Cynthia's movie and she acquits herself quite well. She doesn't quite look as good as she did under direction of the Yuen clan, but that's understandable considering that Sammo Hung and Lau Kar-Leung are the only people who could do a better job than the Yuen clan. Nonetheless, this movie is an excellent showcase for Cynthia's talents and what it lacks in weight it makes up for in volume.

I might mention the presence of Billy Chow in this film. As usual, he has a supporting role as one of the main villain's right-hand men. I have mentioned before that Billy Chow is one of the only perpetual movie villains who came close to matching Hwang Jang Lee's level of authority (Bolo Yeung was another). Billy Chow has always given an honest performance in any movie he appeared in. Heck, if you ask me, he stole the show from Jackie Chan at the end of *Miracles*...although most Jackie Chan opponents tend to do that. The point is that Billy Chow is always a good choice for a movie villain and I'll venture to say that any movie he appears in moves up a notch or two just for his presence.

There are about four stand-out action sequences in this movie. The first is the opening fight sequence that I already mentioned. Cynthia's fight with Chris Lee is also quite good. This fight is almost immediately followed by an extended duel with Billy Chow which unsurprisingly, is very good. For those of you who love to see two girls going at it with unbridled fury, look no further. The finale sees Cynthia Khan taking on Kim Maree Penn. They start off fighting with fisticuffs and throwing each other through what appears to be real glass, and then they pick up katana swords and start wailing on each other in such a way that I wonder if this fight was a partial inspiration for *Kill Bill* (note: during the sword fight, you can see snow following, which I believe was also a part of Uma Thurman's duel with Lucy Liu).

A note on Kim Maree Penn. You may not know who she is, and for that you are justified. She's not all that well-known in movie circles and has only appeared in a handful of B-movies. She's a blonde-haired *gwaito*, although I don't know if she's British or Australian or what. What she is, however, is very talented. I've seen her in some three movies already. I think this was one of her first movies. She does a pretty good job in this movie. However, her best movie performance was *The Death Games* which also stars Terry "Riki-Oh" Fan and (surprise, surprise) Billy Chow. I heard that she fights Cynthia Khan at the end of *Queen's High*, which, if that's the case, I really want to see THAT movie.

I've mainly talked about the movie's action scenes, which for a movie that is non-stop action, is the most important part. The acting and plot are serviceable; nothing horrible but nothing spectacular. The cast is excellent. David Wu and Lo Lieh join Cynthia Khan for the second time (they starred together in *Tiger Cage II* the same year). Billy Chow is good as always and Kim Maree Penn makes a formidable early appearance.

The most negative aspect of this film, at least from my point of view, is the violence. This is a very brutal film, although probably a bit less brutal than *ITLORD 3*. Almost anyone who dies gets it in a violent way. And there's poor David Wu, he gets shot, stabbed, stabbed some more, and by the time he makes it to the end, he still gets manhandled by Ms. Penn.

The strong violence is certainly likely to be a deterrent to sensitive viewers. If you want to watch a more "viewer-friendly" Cynthia Khan movie, watch *Super Lady Cop*. Otherwise, you may want to check this out. It's the kind of action-packed, stunt-filled, wall-to-wall fight movie that Hong Kong no longer produces.

Nevertheless, because of this movie and *ITLOD 4*, I feel that I must dub Cynthia Khan one of the true queens of action cinema. Cynthia Khan...or Yang, I salute you. (by Blake Matthews)

**In the Line of Duty 6: Forbidden Arsenal (Hong Kong, 1991: Cheng Siu-Keung, Yuen Jun-Man) – aka Forbidden Arsenal** - It's a certain matter of contention of wear the *In the Line of Duty* series "jumped the shark" and if even really did so in the first place. The film has seven more-or-less official entries, starting with *Yes, Madam!* In 1985 and ending with *Sea Wolves* in 1991. Afterward, there were three more films that would take upon themselves the *Yes, Madam* moniker, to good or ill (mainly ill). Those films would be *Yes, Madam '92: A Serious Shock*; *Yes Madam 5*; and *Yes Madam* (1995). Only one of those films is considered to be decent by any standards, the other two being considered insults to the name of the great film and the series it spawned.

Anyways, copycats aside, many people believe that the series took a serious dip in quality after the fourth film. In some ways, it was only inevitable. *In the Line of Duty IV* had about an entire third of its running time (possibly more) dedicated to fight scenes, which were choreographed by Yuen Woo-Ping and his group and included a fight atop an ambulance, a moment of dirtbike jousting, and a very long final battle. I mean, it's pretty hard to top that once you get down to it. The fifth movie, which I've reviewed already, is considered to be a frail, weak little thing compared to its predecessors.

I find that affirmation unfair. Cynthia Khan looks great in her fight scenes and is given some great opponents to take on, including Billy Chow, Kim Maree-Penn, and Chris Lee, former member of Jackie Chan's Stunt Group and the film's choreographer. I mean, let's be realistic: reaching the level of a film directed by Yuen Woo-Ping and starring Donnie Yen is a somewhat daunting task for anyone, let alone a single member of Jackie Chan's action team. Only Sammo Hung and his team, Jackie Chan himself, and Lau Kar-Leung could really match *In the Line of Duty IV* in the choreography arena. Nonetheless, there's lots of fight action (more so than some people are willing to admit), some great stunts, and the plot, well, few of the films in the series had anything resembling a great plot.

I hesitate to say that the series ever "jumped the shark" per se, although I will say that this sixth entry is probably the lowest point of the original series, although there's still enough of action and Cynthia Khan to recommend it to most Hong Kong cinephiles and fans of female fighting action.

Paul (Robin Shou, *Tiger Cage II* and the *Mortal Kombat* films) is an arms dealer operating out of Hong Kong. His latest clients have made a huge order for a bunch of pistols, which seem to have been smuggled out of Mainland China hidden inside coffee crates. Anyways, the deal, payment and all, is to take place at some random spot. While the guys are exchanging the goods and the money, a helicopter appears and the voice of everybody's favorite female inspector, Madame Yeung (Cynthia Khan, *Zen of Sword* and *Avenging Quartet*) is heard. Well, these arms dealers (and their clients) are not going to take things sitting down and soon a big gunfight breaks out between the police and the arms dealers. Anyways, after a crazy set piece involving not only a fight atop a moving truck, but Cynthia Khan falling off of said truck, she arrests two subjects, Chen (Waise Lee, *A Better Tomorrow* and *Wing Chun*) and Hua (Do Siu-Chung, *White Lotus Cult* and *Sam the Iron Bridge*).

Madame Yeung takes them to the station for questioning, only to find out that they are both undercover policemen. Chen is a slick but perverted cop from Taiwan, while Hua is something of a backwoods cop from the Chinese Mainland. The three form something of an uneasy partnership, not liking each other at first, but eventually coming to like each other. But more on that in a moment.

Continuing their investigation, their first target is Tam (Philip Kwok, *The Five Deadly Venoms* and *Hard Boiled*), a client of Paul's. Chen tries to hit up Tam for information, but Tam takes him to gay bar and sneaks away, leaving Chen surrounded by sex-starved gays. Comedy! Then, Hua has his hand at Tam, which ends up in big fight between the Hua and Tam's men at an outdoor restaurant.

Madame Yeung eventually tracks Tam down to a car garage where a deal is going on between him and Paul's man Ben (Gary Chow, *Sea Wolves* and *Tiger Cage II*). As expected, a big fight breaks out between Yeung and the two men, which ends in both men escaping, but not before Yeung sees the insignia of a local country club on Ben's clothing.

Madame Yeung and her two compadres go to the country club and while she goes through the records of the club's members, Hua spies Paul's sister Edna (Loletta Lee, *Dragon from Russia* and *Pom Pom and Hot Hot*) and promptly becomes infatuated her, even going so far as to humiliate her fencing teacher (Ridley Tsui in a cameo role) to impress her. Meanwhile, Yeung spots Ben at the country club, leading to another fight between the two, but Ben gets away again.

So Hua starts dating Edna, who is in turned loved by Ben, although she wants nothing to do with her brother Paul and his activities (sounds like a soap opera). Meanwhile, Chen has become infatuated with Yeung, even going so far as to try to bed her after the two of them get drunk one evening. There's also an arms deal gone bad that ends in a violent chase through the streets of Hong Kong, a series of violent robberies committed by Tam and his men following an arms deal, and a final assault on Paul's rather low-budget compound at the film's climax.

If there's any word that can describe this film, it's "rushed." I suppose I could also say "generic" and even use two words and say "low budget" (even compared to other films of its ilk), but the movie comes across as being more rushed than anything else. I'm fully aware that there have been some Hong Kong classics that were filmed over the course of a month or even a couple of weeks, but in this film is it no more apparent than in the action.

The action here is so uneven that you just can't help but think that everything was just rushed. This is especially true when you consider both the cast and the action directors themselves. Paul Wong, who isn't very well-known, has participated in some very important Hong Kong action movies, including *Tiger Cage* and *In the Line of Duty IV*, both of which boast superior action. However, if nothing else, this film is something of a metaphor for the career Paul Wong's co-choreographer, Philip Kwok.

Philip Kwok is best known by fans of the Jade Screen as one of the members of the so-called "Venom Mob" troupe, having played the Lizard Venom in *The Five Deadly Venoms* and the blind fighter in *The Crippled Avengers*. When Robert Tai left the Shaw Brothers, Philip Kwok essentially took his place as action director (alongside fellow troupe members Chiang Shang and Lu Feng) and went on to choreograph some of the greatest weapons-based action ever committed to celluloid in films like *Sword Stained with Royal Blood* and *Flag of Iron*, among others.

After the fall of the traditional martial arts movie in the early 1980s, Philip Kwok was able to, unlike his fellow Venom Mob members, keep finding work in Hong Kong as both a choreographer and a supporting actor. He even occasionally found himself working with critically-acclaimed action directors like Ching Siu-Tung in big films like *Witch from Nepal* and *A Chinese Ghost Story*. However, the quality of his work after he stopped doing movies with the Shaw Brothers studio NEVER equaled the work he did there. In fact, a lot of it was often pretty generic and sometimes just downright bad. For every *Sea Wolves* and *Hard Boiled*, he did disappointing jobs in films like *The Touch* and *Zen of Sword*. This film captures the uneven quality of his career quite well.

There are quite a few action sequences here, including the opening fight atop of a truck, two fights between Cynthia Khan and Gary Chow, two more fights between Do Siu-Chun and Gary Chow, and two fights between Cynthia Khan and Robin Shou, one of them being the finale. Cynthia looks great in her fights, unleashing her usual solid kicks and performing a bit of acrobatics here and there. Robin Shou is also solid, although this isn't his best showcase. And for those of you who like fights where the combatants use found objects and their surroundings, there's plenty of that here.

The film's main disappointments are the two duels between between Do Siu-Chun and Gary Chow. There's really no excuse for their lackluster fighting performances, especially when both of them pick up poles and start sparring at the end. Do Siu-Chun after all was wushu-trained, his trilogy about Chinese folk hero "Iron Bridge" Sam giving him ample opportunity to show off his skills. Heck, he even performs some impressive moves when he fights Philip Kwok at the outdoor restaurant early on. Chow, who didn't have much of a filmography, showed us that same year in *Sea Wolves* that he had physique to pull off some convincing screen fighting. However, their fights are slow and obviously choreographed, lacking punch.

That said, everything else in the film seems generic. Robin Shou makes less of an impression as a villain than he does in other films, like *Tiger Cage II*. Despite their being a scene where he beats a client to death with a gold bar, he never comes across as being all that menacing, and this is in a series that is known for its villains who are right bastards that you want to see die horrible deaths (think *Royal Warriors* and *In the Line of Duty III*). The whole arms dealer deal has been done to death and the fact that his Paul character seems to deal mainly in pistols, you get the whole "they couldn't afford to have fake assault rifles and machine guns" vibe here. I suppose the whole idea of the bad guys having an impenetrable stronghold is interesting, but was done in a better, bigger, and more bombastic way the following year in *Hard Boiled*. The movie simply didn't have the budget *or* the time necessarily to create the sort of wild, over-the-action that we hope for in a film whose bad guys are arms dealers.

By the standards of the other films in the series, this film is a bit underwhelming and needed a better budget and more shooting time to be worthy of being called a member in the *In the Line of Duty* franchise. Taken on its own merits, it's a relatively solid and altogether pretty good Girls n' Guns film that has a solid cast and enough quality fights to make it worth your 90 minutes. And I'm pretty sure that if we compare it to the films Ms. Khan made from the mid 1990s on, it's a near classic. It's also one of the few films in which we see Cynthia Khan kissing onscreen (the other one being *Zen of Sword*, in which she also kisses Waise Lee) and to some, that is more than enough reason to watch it. (by Blake Matthews)

**In the Line of Duty 7: Sea Wolves (Hong Kong, 1991: Cheng Siu-Keung) – aka *Sea Wolves*** - I mentioned in my review of the last entry in the series that, for all of *Forbidden Arsenal's* entertainment value, it was ultimately a generic girls n' guns action film plagued by a low budget and some very uneven action direction from Philip Kwok. In any case, Cynthia Khan, director Cheng Siu-Keung, and action choreographer Philip Kwok got together again the same year to make this film, which would turn out to be the swan song of the *In the Line of Duty* series and Cynthia's fifth (and last) official appearance as Madame Inspector Yeung. Thankfully, with a better cast, a slightly bigger budget (or at least behind-the-camera talent that made the film look like it had a bigger budget), and more consistently good action from Philip Kwok all work together to allow the series to end on a good, if not great, note.

The movie begins with some random drug deal being carried out by Chui (Philip Kwok, *Hard Boiled* and *Ode to Gallantry*), only to be broken up by the sudden appearance of Inspector Yeung (Cynthia Khan, *Yes Madam 5* and *Supercop.com*) and her partner, Ah Min (Lau Wai-Man, *The Inspector Wears Skirts* and *South Shaolin Master II*). Bullets are fired and kicks are thrown and soon we learn that this action sequence has absolutely nothing to do with the rest of the film.

The next scene, however, will. We switch to a cargo ship in the middle of the ocean outside of Hong Kong. The crew is made up of a group of familiar faces, including Norman Tsui (*Wing Chun* and *The Deadly Mantis*), Mak Wai-Cheung (the eagle claw fighter in *Legend of the Wolf*), Eddie Maher (*Yes, Madam* and *The Pedicab Driver*), and Simon Yam (*Hitman* and *Wake of Death*). Our first clue that they're up to no good is when we see them hiding handguns wrapped in plastic inside of oil drums on the ship. They must be smugglers.

A second, more telling clue that these guys are more crooked than a barrel of snakes (I love that line) is when they come across a ship full of Vietnamese emigrants floating adrift on open sea. After helping the emigrants onto the ship, they proceed to hack them all to death with machetes, after which they steal whatever money they had planned on taking with them into Hong Kong. So these guys are not only smugglers, but modern day pirates as well (maybe those Somali pirates wouldn't give us so much hassle if we sic'd Inspector Yeung on them). There is one survivor, however, and that's Garry (Garry Chow, who played a villain in the previous *ITLTD* film), an extremely muscular fellow who, fortunately for him, is an old friend of John's (Yam). John hides Garry, who hits his head on something hard and metallic at one point, conveniently coming down with amnesia.

When the ship arrives in the Hong Kong harbor, the usual customs search of the ship goes well until some customs agents discover Garry hidden away on the ship. They try to arrest him, but he fights his way off and flees into Hong Kong itself. Meanwhile, Inspector Yeung gets into another random, but well-choreographed fight scene that has little to no bearing on the plot. Garry meets up with Yelia (Wong Yuk-Hang, *The Killer's Love*), a prostitute friend of Inspector Yeung's. Seeing the large wad of cash Garry has on him, Yelia takes him shopping for some real clothes (leading some comedy where he his large muscles cause him to rip through several good suits) and have some fun around town. She'll also take advantage of his money for her own use, although as a good professional, Yelia also gives him some of her services in return.

While all this is going on, an arms deal between the pirates and some buyers goes awry, and the pirates end up killing every single one of their clients. One of the clients, however, rips off a locket that belonged to Garry's sister and had his picture in it, so when the police come to investigate, Garry the illegal immigrant is the prime suspect. Yeung, having seen Garry briefly with Yelia, figures that he's at her pad and pays her friend a visit with a number of cops in tow. Garry flees into the forest, chased by Yeung, leading to a kung fu/stunt sequence in the forest and at a construction site filled with (presumably) illegal immigrants.

Garry finally meets back up with John, who tries to protect him from the police and get him back on the ship. On John's side is the captain (Lam Seung-Mo, *So Close*), who happens to be his brother. Unfortunately, the rest of the crew is getting antsy to just get the heck out of dodge and the captain's insistence on waiting for John and Garry to get back isn't winning him any friends. Finally, John arranges for a meeting with a captain at a cemetery. Said meeting doesn't go very well, with the pirates, led by Norman Tsui, turning against the captain and killing him. John and Garry escape, but are now on the run from both the police, led by Inspector Yeung, and the pirates themselves. Things are going to get a lot more violent from here on out.

One of the things that *Forbidden Arsenal* lacked was a memorable villain. I mean, yes, the villain was played by Robin Shou, whom we all recognize as the guy who played Liu Kang in the *Mortal Kombat* films and who co-starred in *Beverly Hills Ninja*. Robin Shou had played a really good villain the previous year in Yuen Woo-Ping's *Tiger Cage II*, but in that film the action was top-notch and Shou's character was particularly brutal, especially in his fight against David Wu. In *ITLTD 6*, he just wasn't that menacing. I bring this up because the *ITLTD* series usually prided themselves on villains that were memorable because they were nasty (Pai Ying in *Royal Warriors*, Michiko Nishiwaki and Stuart Ong in *ITLTD 3*) or really good fighters (Dick Wei in *Yes, Madam!*; Michael Woods and John Salvitti in *ITLTD 4*; Billy Chow and Kim Maree Penn in *ITLTD 5*) backed by good action directors.

I'm glad to say that this last film in the series stays true to form by having villains that are somewhat memorable, mainly Norman Tsui, on account of how evil they are. The massacre sequence early on establishes how much we want to see these guy die horrible deaths by the film's denouement, but Norman Tsui, a good actor and one of

those fellows blessed with the ability to do practically anything the choreographer tells him to do, just keeps on chugging by stabbing people to death with a very big, scary-looking knife and killing cops. You really want him to get every bone in his upper body broken by the end of the film.

Also, one of the calling cards of the series is that Inspector Yeung spends the entire film being a righteous upholder of justice, playing by the rules as much as possible, only to go above the law at the end in order to bring the criminals to justice, for one reason or another. The previous film lacked that, as her courageous assault on Shou's base was the result of the officer running the operation getting shot to death, leaving her more or less in charge. Here, she basically goes above the law by invading the pirate ship after it's already left the Hong Kong harbor and thus out of police jurisdiction. This leads to a memorable end where the two heroes have gotten their hands on the main villain and Inspector Yeung simply turns her back as they brutally put him to death, citing that she has no legal power on the high seas.

Philip Kwok's action here is quite good, constituting one of his better choreography gigs of his post-Venom Mob career. As the other films in the series, we get a fair combination of fist and gun action and Cynthia Khan is at the top of her game, especially in the finale on the ship. Her kicks are powerful and she's quite acrobatic, more so than other films of the era. As usual, we get a number of found objects, knives, iron bars, sledge hammers, cargo nets, etc. being used as weapons throughout the course of the film. The finale is the best fight in the film, although Khan's second random fight early on is also very well mounted. One thing neat about the former is how well Khan performs in such a claustrophobic environment, especially while fighting against multiple opponents. We wish Kwok could have maintained this level of quality in all of his films throughout his career.

Garry Chow, whose chiseled physique helps make for a memorable character, fights better here than he did in *Forbidden Arsenal*. He mainly uses fast, short-range punches and professional wrestling-inspired throws. Simon Yam also tries to fight, although he's a little less convincing here than in other films. It's pretty obvious he's not a trained martial artist, especially when fighting alongside someone like Cynthia Khan.

Fans of 1980s HK cinema will recognize character actor Tai Bo, a Jackie Chan regular, in a supporting role as an arrogant cop. His role is mainly that of comic relief, and is somewhat out of place in an otherwise serious and violent action film. The same sort of criticism was levied by some viewers at *In the Line of Duty III*, which was extremely hardcore in terms of sex and violence, but then had broad humor supplied by Richard Ng of all people.

The main problem with this film is that it's not completely Cynthia Khan's movie. She's the main character and gets the best fight scenes, but the bulk of the plot is devoted to Gary Chow and Simon Yam. We can make the argument that this happens in a lot of Cynthia Khan films, or even the *ITLOD* series as a whole, and even justify it from the point of view that the conflict, modern day pirates preying on emigrant boats, is unique enough that focusing on one of the victims is a nice departure from the usual police procedural story perspective. Most people, however, will dismiss the approach as being sexist and complain that the filmmakers didn't think Cynthia Khan could carry a film by herself, despite being a pretty good actress, a beautiful woman, and a great onscreen fighter.

I won't say that this film is as good as the first, second, fourth, and fifth installments in the *In the Line of Duty* series, because it isn't. It is, however, a step up from part six and a decent enough action film on its own merits to merit a good score and a recommendation from yours truly. I'm sad that the series ended here. I'd like for Benny Chan to make a big-budget action movie with Cynthia Khan called *New In the Line of Duty* and fill it full of large-scale stunts and quality kung fu, although he could probably do with changing his choreographer from Nicky Li to Corey Yuen. Or maybe just get Yuen Woo-Ping and his team back again. That'd be awesome. (by Blake Matthews)

**Inspector Wears Skirts, The (Hong Kong, 1988: Welsson Chin) - aka Top Squad** - I love silly little "B" films like this one that are filled to the brim with some of my favorite "B" actresses (though Amy Yip was regrettably not in this film as she is credited in some places). There is just a corny charm about these low budget films that I find very appealing. There isn't much doubt that the inspiration for this four film series was the American film *Police Academy* – but doing it within the framework of a girls with guns film makes it feel fresh and offbeat. And can you imagine Hollywood doing a comedy film like this – where the women often brutally beat up the men and are on occasion whacked around pretty well themselves.

Though the film's focus is primarily of a comedic nature, there is some action at the beginning and end of the film with a few bits in between. The comedy is somewhat juvenile but good natured with Sandra Ng leading the way, while the action though not top tier is not at all bad with Cynthia Rothrock contributing nicely.

In fact, the film opens with a terrific action scene as Cynthia and Sibelle Hu prevent some Ninjas from assassinating a Royal personage visiting HK. Cynthia shows some very acrobatic moves – while Sibelle looks better than I have ever seen her. Not only does she look quite stunning in this film – but her action choreography is very competently

done as she delivers a few excellent kicks. The two of them take out the Ninjas with the last one being hauled up a flagpole and blown to pieces!

After this exhilarating opening, the film settles down for the next hour into basic comedy. Bill Tung requests that Sibelle train a special cadre of women officers to become an elite fighting force. Some of these turn out to be Ann Bridgewater, Kara Hui Ying-Hung, Sandra Ng, Ellen Chan and many others that I don't know but have seen in a bunch of films. What qualifications these women have other than being quite attractive (except for ugly duckling Sandra!) I don't know – but it makes for great viewing!

So they go through arduous training – learn how to work together – but also find time to romance and compete against a men's SWAT team being trained by Stanley Fung. In one training exercise the girls have to outrun lighted gasoline – and the outtakes show how dangerous this was. Much of the comedy revolves around poor Sandra trying to find some man – any man – to romance her and Stanley falling head over heels for the tough as nails Sibelle. There is also a martial arts contest – in which Kara looks swift and deadly as she makes mincemeat of her male counterpart. Kara in fact looks great throughout this film and has a few choice scenes.

Of course all fun things must come to an end and the two groups are assigned to protect some valuable jewels at a fashion show – though the girls are brought along only as “flower vases” so that the men don't look too conspicuous. No need to say who saves the day! Jeff Falcon plays one of the baddies here – and has a few good gos with Cynthia, Kara and a few others. At one point two of the girls grab his arms, take a running jump off a table and body slam him into a wall. That had to hurt (I found this Jeff Falcon site on the web).

This Jackie Chan production is all good fun. Part of whether you might like this or not probably depends on whether you are a fan of some of these actresses – which I certainly am. Cynthia looks so much better in her HK productions than in her US films. Kara never ceases to amaze me with how smooth and fast she can move – like a panther – and I really wish she had gotten roles in some of the “A” films to showcase her skills. Sandra mugs throughout – but is quite effective and funny at times – while I think Ann Bridgewater is simply lovely and I like her in everything I see of hers. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Inspector Wears Skirts II, The (Hong Kong, 1989: Wellson Chin)** - Much of the same cast comes back in this follow up to the 1988 Golden Harvest film that sort of set the standard for girls with guns action/comedy. Both films are directed by Wellson Chin (he directed the recent Era of the Vampires) and produced by Jackie Chan and have much else in common. There is a little bit in these films for everyone – female bonding, goofy comedy, a little sex appeal and some decently choreographed action and a bit of choreographed dancing! For those though that prefer their action straight and unadulterated, these films may be rough going at times – the second one in particular.

While the first had the presence of Cynthia Rothrock to give it a real shot of adrenaline from time to time, this one really doesn't get to the action until the very end. There are a few intermittent punch em ups that can't be taken very seriously, but much of the running time is filled with the comic shenanigans of Sandra Ng and Billy Lau – not always an easy pill to swallow. Even the final action set piece against a group of terrorists feels a bit more slapdash than the action in the first film. There are compensating pluses though that come in the form of Amy Yip. The Yipster is incorrectly credited with being in the first installment of this series (four films) in some places, but this is one of her very first – if not her first – major role in which her voluptuous figure takes center stage.

Gone from the female squad are Ann Bridgewater and Ellen Chan, but returning are Sandra Ng, Kara Hui Ying Hung, Regina Kent and Sibelle Hu as the stern Madam Hu. Throw in Suki Kwan as well into the group of veterans. Some new recruits show up – Amy, May Lo and Angile Leung – and immediately a rivalry is sparked between the new and the old – feces in the bed, practical jokes and one good roustabout in the cafeteria that leaves a few bruises and some bloody noses. In the end of course they have to come together not only to beat the bad guys, but also to compete against the Flying Tiger Squad.

The Flying Tiger Squad are the male recruits training in the same facility – headed by Stanley Fung and populated by the likes of Billy Lau, Mars and Ken Lo. Sandra is still chasing romantically after Billy and still being rejected like an old newspaper. Billy remains his lecherous self and is at one point caught peeping into the girl's shower and gets his humiliating comeuppance. In many ways the film is really a weaker carbon copy of the first – even having a martial arts match between the men and the women – but while the first film had a terrific display from Kara this one focuses on comedy and the main event is between Billy and Sandra. In fact for some odd reason Kara is given very little to do during the action scenes – odd because she is really the only legitimate action actor among the females.



Melvin Wong shows up as a top policeman to check on the skills of the women and becomes interested in Sibelle – much to the annoyance of Stanley who has kept his adoration of her to himself. All of these rivalries are soon forgotten though when a major terrorist – the Golden Haired Lion - breaks away from the police and hides up in some rough terrain with a large group of his followers. Finally, after somewhat slogging through all the comedy the viewer is given some solid action as the men and women team up to go in and get them. Both Bill Tung and Rickey Hui have cameos in the film. (Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Inspector Wears Skirts 3 (Hong Kong, 1990: Wellson Chin) - aka *Raid on the Royal Casino Marine*** - This is probably the least viewed of the four films in this particular series, and with (arguably) good reason. The premise is simple: criminals have stolen dozens of guns from under the police's collective noses, and the Superintendent decides to set up the Super Policewoman (Ba Wong Fa--the name of the film series) program again. Madam Wu (Sibelle Hu, in what is essentially an extended cameo) has retired after marrying Officer Kan (Stanley Fung), and the latter is tasked with training the girls. Those include Amy (Sandra Ng); big-breasted Susanna (Amy Yip); May (Kara Hui Ying-Hung); Sandy (Yip San), whose character is defined by her body odor; and another girl (Wong Wai-Kei), who has no personality trait whatsoever. Officer Kan and his assistant (Billy Lau) torture the girls into shape. They board a casino cruise, where some robbers plan on robbing the big 200-million-dollar gambling championship event on the ship.

The first forty-minutes or so is KOMEDY based around Kan tormenting his female pupils, physically and mentally. During this segment, there's an extended gag involving Jason and *A Chinese Ghost Story*. When the story moves onto the cruise ship, we get a *God of Gamblers* subplot and a romance subplot about Sandra Ng falling for Shing Fui-On. The action begins in the last 20 minutes, in which the terrorists mow down quite a few innocent people. Madam Wu suddenly swoops in and takes out most of the terrorists, Under Siege style.

There's precious little action in this film, and it's all reserved for the end. Most of the martial arts comes from Chui Ying-Jat, a Korean superkicker on par with the likes of Ken Lo and Ben Lam. I thought he was Ken Lo a few times during the film. He takes on all the girls simultaneously and looks good doing it. Sadly, despite this being a Girls 'n Guns film (of sorts), the girls are mostly useless, including Kara Hui. She's the only real martial artist among the protagonists and she trades a few blows, but fails to do anything really interesting. A waste of talent and, ultimately, a waste of time. (by Blake Matthews)

**Inspector Wears Skirts IV (Hong Kong, 1992: Wellson Chin)** - By the time this final film in the series was made in 1992 Jackie Chan had dropped his involvement and the footsteps of the decline of the Girls with Guns genre could be heard approaching. Most fans tend to dismiss this one as rather a silly low budget gasp to hold on to its declining audience, but I actually thought in some ways that it was more entertaining than either the second or third films in the series. Though it has lower production values than those earlier films and feels like it has a light layer of dust on its proceedings, what it has going for it is a ramp up in the action and three of the biggest female action stars by the names of Moon Lee, Cynthia Khan and Kara Hui Ying Hung.

Times are tough for the current squad – Sibelle married Stanley Fung in the third episode and has retired, Sandra Ng left the force and ended up becoming a single mom and Kara had an accident and has been placed in a mental institution. Running the group now is the diminutive Moon Lee who does her best to stay out of harms way and prefers training her squad in Chinese Opera as opposed to police tactics. After they botch capturing some bad guys who are trying to rescue their head from the cops, their supervisors (Woo Fung and Paul Fonoroff – in one of his biggest roles in a HK film) decide a revamping is due and bring in super cop Cynthia Khan to shape them up.

Cynthia is as tough as Martha Stewart with a subpoena and a roomful of lawyers - and she has a spiffy pair of boots that allows her to fly short distances. Not much later, they again mess up an assignment and the entire squad hands in their resignations to Moon – telling her that it is best that she stays because there is nothing else she is capable of doing and may starve on the outside. Moon pouts but realizes this all too true and so stays put.

The resignations force Moon to go looking to fill the ranks and she tracks down some of the ex-members to bring the glory back to the group. Sandra is now an over-protective mom and a security guard – but they are able to frame her into re-enlisting and they help get Kara released from the loony bin. Billy Lau pops up in this one as well – he is now a Phys Ed teacher and Sheila Chan is his extremely jealous accident-prone traffic cop wife. Things don't get much better and the group looks to be on the verge of dissolving when the same bad guys take over a school and hold a number of small children hostage – and implant a bomb in each one of them – the women decide to go against orders and save them.

The action begins during the opening credits and is fairly constant throughout – as opposed to the earlier films that usually led up to a big finale at the end. There are five action set pieces in total – with of course the big bruising one climaxing the movie. Some of it is surprisingly brutal – a nurse gets shot point blank for being annoying, a guy is blown up by a bomb he was forced to swallow and the girls often get the hell whacked out of them. The always-adorable Moon goes into scardy cat mode for much of the film, but guts it out in the end as she and Cynthia take on the main bad guy in a wang bang fight. Kara has some lovely moments as well and has a few opportunities to show her classic martial arts form – as she uses arrows, pike and kung fu at times. This is not to imply that this is a great Girls with Guns film – it is not – but it had an enjoyable slice of action, some tasteless comedy and few cute parodies - such as one of *Police Story* in which Sheila Chan runs down a hill in an attempt to stop a bus but with a very different result than Jackie had! (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Island of Fire (Taiwan, 1990: Kevin Chu Yen-Ping) – aka *Island on Fire*; *The Prisoner*** - Andy(Tony Leung) is a tough and resourceful Police officer who's girlfriends father is gunned down. Only the killer who murdered him was supposed to have been executed in prison months before the incident. This forces Andy to go undercover in the very prison the killer was serving his time.

Tony Leung leads an all star cast in this gritty dark prison thriller produced by former Shaw Brothers star Jimmy Wang Yu. Hong Kong veteran Chu Yen-Ping handles directors duties for this crime film. Yen-Ping a veteran of over ninety films, is still active today with his latest movie being the comedy Oolong Courtyard(2016). He was also no stranger to Jimmy Wang Yu having directed his 1983 all star collaboration Fantasy Mission Force. Island Of Fire is a who's who of Hong Kong cinema and I could easily write an article just studying the cast members alone. For the sake of this month's theme I'll try and just stick to the main cast members.

The film opens with Andy and his girlfriend Yua Fong(Yip Chuen-Chan) visiting her father played by Choo Kin. Heavy rain begins to pour as the couple leave for the night and get into their car. Before the car engine even starts gunshots are heard. The gunman runs to a get- away car, only its rigged with a bomb and blows up. When the police look into the killers identity they find out he's supposed to have been executed in a prison three months earlier. The sombre opening scenes really set the tone for the rest of movie. When Andy goes undercover to find out what's happening things don't get any lighter. Whenever there are any exterior shots its always dull and over caste. This really adds to the films serious approach.

Andy meets a number of different characters, all with their own stories to tell. One of the things I really like about this film is how there's a few different stories that all intermix with each other. He quickly befriends the streetwise Charlie played superbly by Tou Chung-Hua. Charlie acts as his guide by helping him get used to the prison system. It's not long before Andy must prove himself by fighting the toughest inmate played by the well built Rocky Lai Keung-Kun. The fight scene features one of the many nods to the Paul Newman film Cool Hand Luke which appear throughout the picture. Despite losing Tony Leung's character refuses to give in. Just like the scene where Paul Newman refuses to give up in a fight with George Kennedys Dragline character.

Which brings me onto the subject of the films fight scenes staged by old school actor and action director Lam Man-Cheung. Here he does a fine job handling the very grounded and at times desperate fight scenes. In some of the encounters he gets a great sense of how the two people involved are really struggling to stay alive. A really good example of this would be the knife fight between Boss Lee(Andy Lau) and Steve(Jackie Chan). He allows Chan to show off some of his trademark acrobatic/stunt skills, but still manages to retain that serious edge to the fights. This does not have the level of action you might expect when considering the some of the cast. However what there is appropriate when you consider the whole style of the film. I also enjoyed the brief scene where Andy fights off the thugs in the bar with a little inventive use of some beer cans and his coat pockets.

By the time iconic actor Jimmy Wang Yu had made this film in 1989, his career had long since passed its peak. His charisma and screen presence however had not faded at all. He may not have the most screen time in this production but he plays one of its most memorable characters Lucas. Wang Yu's character name is another nod to the prison film Cool Hand Luke. The whole picture sometimes feels like a big nod to the prison genre as a whole at times. He has one of the best introductions in the entire movie too as we first see him emerging from serving time in solitary confinement. With a big scar down his face and triad related tattoo's he makes for a striking image. The scar might be another nod to a certain well known Hollywood criminal?. The inmates all appear to worship him with a few exceptions. Not many performers could have such a big impact on a film without even being the star or focus of the story. Yet Jimmy Wang Yu manages to do exactly that without having to be really over the top.

I feel like I've missed out a lot but I didn't want to give away too much about the story/ending. The direction at times is a little slack and with so many stars it must have been hard to balance each characters screen time. You also have to consider that it only took them 42 days to film the movie in Taiwan. That said the story is a little different and there's a few twists right up to the very end. Seeing so many big stars in the same film is also part of its charm. Sammo Hung even manages to slip a little dose of his comedy into just a couple of scenes. One standout scene involving Sammo and an attractive woman, who needs the wheel on her car replacing. Which also plays out as another nod to Cool Hand Luke, and its famous car wash scene. Overall it's not the kind of film you might expect Sammo or Jackie Chan to appear in.

Chang Kuo-Chu should also get a mention for his excellent portrayal of the criminal Seng, who works for Iron Ball a.k.a Boss Lee. Yip Cheun-Chan has the only significant female role in the entire film. Sadly, she doesn't get that much screen time to make much of an impression acting wise. The soundtrack features some original and borrowed scores. It's a typical score of the era and could just as easily be featured in a John Woo movie. One of the soundtracks original tracks called The Last Gunshot by Cui Jian, was inspired by the Tiananmen massacre in Beijing China on June 4 1989. Over-all I really enjoyed watching the film again for this month's theme. I couldn't believe just how much of a Cool Hand Luke tribute this movie is. That might be the subject of a future review next time I decide to see this again. Despite the loans of the low budget fans of the cast should at least give this film a chance. (by DragonClaws of KFF)

**Island of Greed (Hong Kong, 1997: Michael Mak)** - While this is a "triad movie", if your definition of triad movie is action and bullets you may want to pass on this.

The narrative is interesting, but is too convoluted to feel invested or entertained by it. The movie starts out as a political thriller/drama, and is very interesting. It loses steam as many characters are introduced, and few are built upon much, if at all. Then it seems like it will become a righteous cop/action movie, but also fails at that...as the main "good guy"(Andy Lau) has nearly no characterization. It struggles to balance these two main plots. The political side of it was very interesting, but it ends abruptly and seems minor and unimportant about half-way through the movie.....after an hour of emphasizing it. Between these two major plots there are a couple romantic points which aren't built on enough to matter for the most part. Scenes that should be powerful aren't(deaths, a man being hung from a helicopter, sweet scene!) due to lack of characterization for the minor characters.

I have to give special mention to Tony Leung for his performance here.. While the other lead in Andy Lau was pretty weak, Tony Leung put on a fantastic performance, and was easily the best part of this movie. The supporting cast was all pretty solid, but unfortunately most of them didn't get much to work with. Pauline Shen and Annie Wu both put in good performances for the little time they got.

There isn't much action, and there is no martial arts. What action is there works well and is entertaining though. Riots, scuffles, minor chases, its all shot a little frantically but is still entertaining. There even seemed to be a bit of light comedy mixed in which also generally worked well. The soundtrack was pretty sweet, I'll be youtubeing a couple of the tracks for sure.

Although it may sound like I'm saying this movie is bad, it really isn't. It actually does a lot right, but unfortunately it just doesn't put it together well. There are some fun action scenes, and the political aspect of the story is very interesting before it's abrupt and cheap feeling ending. Unfortunately, the major plot of Andy Lau's character's motivation, and even his big "bust" of the criminal operation feels far too rushed and doesn't work. The amount of characters and backstabs can become confusing, but I wasn't too bothered by it...I think I've become adept at filtering out what isn't necessary for the main plot by watching Chor Yuen movies, lol.

Overall? It was more entertaining than not, but I won't watch it again. If you like your Triad movies with guns and action, give this one a pass - its focus is on politics, as is its strength. The over-complex narrative and lack of characterization overpower some interesting plot points and a great performance from Tony Leung. While this movie does a lot right, it lacks the focus to be fully entertaining. I can only recommend to Tony Leung fans, but its worth a watch if you stumble across it.

**It Takes a Thief (Hong Kong, 1999: Chan Chuen)** - After recent cameo fight appearances, a rumored injury, and avoidance of punching, it's good to see Yukari back in top form, fighting at full throttle. The plot is essentially a re-make of "Midnight Angel/The Justice Women." Yukari plays HK Police Inspector Shum Ling. When a shootout goes

wrong, one of her men, Ye Jin, is injured. He's engaged to her sister, Tong, and Shum Ling must break the news of his death to Tong while she's planning her wedding. She blames Ling for Jin's death, and angrily rejects her. When Ling's investigation fails to yield progress, Tong goes undercover as a masked vigilante. In the meantime, Ye Jin has actually faked his own death to go undercover to infiltrate Hong Bao's gang. He achieves this by proving his worth in several fights and passing a series of loyalty tests. When both Ling's police work and Tong's vigilante methods begin to close in on the gang, Bao retaliates by ordering them killed. During an intense fight at their apartment the sisters' elderly father is killed. Ling shoots to death Yong, one of the gang members, at point blank range. Jin is discovered, and is used as bait by Bao.

During an extended final fight sequence reminiscent of the best of the GWG genre, Ling and Tong take on the entire gang in a lumber yard. Yukari looks great, older and a shade slower, but just as energetic. How many other middle-aged women are out there trading punches and tumbling in the mud? She performs numerous impressive kicks and is back to punching - very hard. Of technical interest are a number of disarm moves when she confronts opponents armed with swords or pistols. In this film, Yukari's the one to watch, and has plenty of screen time and character development. She not only fights particularly well, but is also back to plain black casual attire. Her character is mocked and ridiculed because she's older yet romantically uninvolved. She doesn't seem to care. In addition to combat, she takes an emotional pounding from Tong, her sister. Overall, this film represents a welcome return to the forms and themes that make Yukari wonderful to watch. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**It's Now or Never (Hong Kong, 1992: Chan Kwok-Hei)** - Ooh, watch out. The Teddy Girls are out on the streets tonight - dressed in blood red jackets and boots that match the slash of lipstick across their snarling mouths. Looking like sleek polished sports cars primed to go, it is only a matter of time before trouble calls out their names and it does in the sexy shape of Chewing-gum. Down at the local dance hall the band is ripping out the latest jangly surf tune and the boys are twisting as close as they can to any girl that will let them. It's HK in the early 60's and cokes are selling for 30 cents. Chewing-gum (Pauline Chan) is whispering sweet intimate come-ons into the ear of Little Bun's (Cynthia Khan) boyfriend but this little tete-a-tete is noticed by two of the teddy girls and they speed away to tell Little Bun the bad news. Within a few minutes, the gang headed by Cheung Man comes strutting through the doors - pull out their clubs and all hell breaks loose - all wonderfully punctuated by the guitar driven music. It's ten minutes of divine rock and roll cinema.

I love these retro films - and there is something about a tough Teddy girl gang film taking place in the HK of the 60's that just struck me as very cool. As soon as the camera first slowly pans up past Cheung Man's red vinyl boots, past her bare legs and short white skirt, pauses to take in her stylish jacket and then to her insolently blowing out cigarette smoke I was hooked. This woman is as hard as rock candy, but much easier on the eye. Cheung Man just takes over this film with her scorching looks and her "screw you" attitude.

The cops come in and break up the fight and they all end up down at the police station where Cheung Man's younger sister, Rain Lau, is also being booked for some petty crime. Rain is only a schoolgirl but she is doing her best to not let it bother her or slow down her criminal activities like selling pills. Soon dad - Ng Man-Tat - shows up - but it isn't a sympathy call - he too is being booked for cheating some woman. This is their family - not a model family exactly - but a family nevertheless - and the film revolves for the most part around their fighting and loving one another.

It turns out that he is a third rate Lothario with a specialty of courting incredibly unattractive women and then bilking them out of as much money as possible. Pickings are slim these days though especially with his sex drive going in reverse and his chest full of aphrodisiacs not helping any more. Some of his ex-paramours are after him and so are some local triad collectors. Ng Man-Tat has some hilarious scenes in this film - and one in which he tries to seduce the mother of Cheung's wealthy boyfriend with a cherry in his mouth is a classic.

Also being surprisingly funny in this film is Cynthia Khan. She plays very much against type here as one of the gang and Cheung's best friend. She is all bluster and threats - and displays some lovely kung-fu stances - but when the fighting begins she continually gets clobbered. I was dying for one true Cynthia moment and we finally get it when she beats the hell out of her boyfriend (remember him?) who has forced her into prostitution.

The first forty-five minutes of the film are like speeding down the highway - the top down - and the wind blowing through your hair - just a complete blast. The film is splendid tongue in cheek fun - and sizzingly stylish - but then it slows down - loses its Teddy girl focus to become more of a bizarre family drama - and then in the final fifteen minutes it gets somewhat brutal and starts taking itself seriously. It is a shame that it goes off track like that because it was feeling extremely unique for a while - but then settles into becoming a much more typical HK film towards the end.

The 60's sets and feel are great, the soundtrack is pure surf music and Cheung Man is absolutely delicious in this film. One scene of her whipping off her wig and shaking out her hair in slo-mo is one of those magical moments in cinema – just poetry. She gets excellent support from the other actors. Rain Lau is funny and touching as her loud mouthed little sister. Ng Man-Tat loves his daughters but is not much of a role model and finally brings down disaster upon them. I wish Cynthia Khan had been in more comedic roles such as this. She constantly cracked me up with her threatened "Eagle Claws" stance. And Lawrence Cheng is sympathetic as the geeky straight arrow cop who takes one look at Cheung Man and falls in love.

**Jail on Burning Island (Taiwan, 1997: Kevin Chu Yen-Ping)** - Chu Yen-Ping re-visits *Island Of Fire* territory, the original product that contained shot for shot scene theft from other films and in full length form (Hong Kong version was shortened substantially), some actual good drama. With *The Jail In Burning Island*, the prison movie gets rerun before us, containing back stories about legal and not legal characters before they went to prison, bonding, beatings, corruption in the higher ranks, the lowly getting affected by their newly gained power in the jail, solitary confinement, the big boss getting anything you want including hookers and even drama about the fear of being released. There's a slick movie on display here, with plenty of violence, grit, stylized cinematography and the trademark of Chu's action being very loud and direct. It works on that level but is more of a flimsy, very basic drama otherwise. Chu is not that much better than what we get here but the sole well intended melodramatic piece of the film in regards to one of the prisoners being released in a world he's afraid of combined with well choreographed gunplay doesn't elevate him. With Takeshi Kaneshiro, Nicky Wu, Ng Man-Tat, Anthony Wong, Jackson Lau, Wong Yat-Fei and Yvonne Yung. (by So Good Reviews)

**Just Heroes (Hong Kong, 1989: John Woo, Wu Ma)** - Probably John Woo's most criticized film of his Heroic Bloodshed/Bullet Ballet cycle. It was made as a fundraiser for Chang Cheh, who executive produced. It was also co-directed by the other Woo, that is, Wu Ma (another former Chang Cheh protégé). Apparently 80% was directed by Woo on a virtual shoestring--the actors apparently worked for free--with Wu Ma and the leads directing the rest.

The story is a bit complex. Boss Tsou is a Triad boss who runs a shipping business that he uses for smuggling purposes (albeit we learn later that drugs are a no-no). Tsou wants to go straight, but before he can do that, he is murdered in his car at a gas station in a hit that suggests an inside job. When his successor is announced, Uncle Ma (Wu Ma) goes against the original will and testament and names Sou (Danny Lee) to the post. This upsets both Tai (Chen Kuan Tai) and his main enforcer, Jacky (Stephen Chow), who blames himself for Tsou's murder. Whose name was actually on the will? That would be Wai (David Chiang), who gave up the Triad business to run a small fishery. Wai stays on the sidelines for a period. The real complications begin when a tape emerges implicating Sou in the murder, which sets off Jacky. Jacky takes his "righteous" anger out on Sou's pregnant wife (Tien Nu), which gets blamed on another arms dealer (Shing Fui-On), who had been pressuring Sou to start up a partnership before. Soon the bullets start flying and bodies start piling up.

The main problem with this film is that there are so many characters that it's difficult to say just who the main character is. The movie spends almost equal time with all of them, so they ultimately feel underdeveloped. Usually, John Woo contents himself with two or three principal protagonists and several well-written supporting characters, with the rest being cannon fodder. But here, it's never completely clear if the movie wants to be about David Chiang's reluctant return to the Triad World, Chen Kuan-Tai's hidden ambition, Stephen Chow's search for justice, or Danny Lee's attempts to learn how to lead a Triad organization. It's all of those and more, and thus feels a lot shallower than your average John Woo Heroic Bloodshed film.

The action is all gunplay, brought to you courtesy of Lau Kar-Wing (who did the Heroic Bloodshed thing with **Dragon Family**) and Yuen Bun (who did the gunfights for Chow Yun-Fat's **City War**). The gunfights are surprisingly uneven, which makes me wonder if the film didn't start with one action director and then simply switched to another. That would be strangely reminiscent of **Once Upon a Time in China**, in which Lau Kar-Wing started out as the main action director, and then Tsui Hark brought in two of the Yuen Clan brothers when Lau proved far too traditional for his tastes. The opening gunfight against Philip Ko and his men feels a bit awkward. The assassination sequence in the rain at a gas station isn't quite so much a gunfight, but is okay. The shootout at the mine is also okay, hampered by Danny Lee spending most of the scene driving in circles.

The two set pieces that stand out are a flashback where David Chiang takes out some clients who are using the shipping business for drugs (a no-no), who are led by Kong Do. This is where you get a lot more over-the-top gun-fu stunts, which is what made me wonder if this wasn't the point that Yuen Bun stepped in. Then there's the climax, which is a gunfight between all of the main characters inside a mansion. That has more one-on-one/two-on-one

gunplay, plus some more of those crazy only-in-the-movies gun stunts. It doesn't match Woo's other films in terms of sheer body count, but it's long and feels a bit more choreographed than some of those films' scenes. I thought that was nice.

Finally, I guess Woo finally felt the need to address the impact of his movies on the masses. **A Better Tomorrow** was one of the top-grossing films of the entire decade. It had an enormous impact on the careers of its stars and director, and even apparently made a lot of ignorant kids want to join Triad gangs. In this movie, there's a character, an employee at David Chiang's fishery, who is always citing lines from **A Better Tomorrow** and asking Chiang to let him join the organization. At the end, when he gets excited at having survived a gunfight, David Chiang grabs him and forces him to look up close at a body of a man who took a bullet to the head. He then asks, "Do you want to be a mob boss, or work at a fishery?" In other words, a movie may stylize or glorify violence, but in the end, it's just a movie. Real violence is f\*\*\*\*\* scary. Don't you ever forget that.

**Kickboxer's Tears (Hong Kong, 1992: Shen Da-Wei)** - A kickboxer is killed in the ring by a dirty opponent who works for a syndicate. The sister of the dead kickboxer vows revenge by facing off against both the dirty kickboxer and the crime syndicate.

Wasn't sure what I was watching exactly, and then the ending happened. Holy crap!

What about the fights?

The movie starts with long kickboxing fights that are pretty good but don't really bring anything new to the table, even if, sadly, Ken Lo is the one doing the fighting (he is mostly wasted here, again).

Then Moon Lee joins the fray, and it gets awesome.

1st she fights Billy Chow and Yukari in a restaurant. Great scene.

Then she fights Billy Chow in a kickboxing match that's also pretty damn great.

Then she fights Yukari Oshima in an epic 1v1 duel that's alone worth watching the whole movie for.

And THEN she also fights with some more bad guys and it's equally as incredible.

Summary

Stunts - 94/100 | Stuntmen engulfed in flames jumping out of buildings - Jackie Chan would approve (maybe he actually did?)

Narrative - 56/100 | Impressive just how shitty the editing is, up until the final sequence when it goes full reverse and becomes a crash-course on how to superbly edit 3 godly action sequences together and make an ending set-piece that packs a wallop.

Fight Choreography - 95/100 | Ignoring the overly long Kickboxing matches near the beginning (they're still pretty good), every fight that follows is better than the last one. Everyone brings their A-game eventually, these fights are raw, poignant, and look hella hurting, and probably are. Precise, rough, and organic choreography.

Also, I thought the best kick I'd ever seen was in *Twinkle, Twinkle, Lucky Stars*, performed by Yuen Biao, and while it may still hold the top spot, we have a tie now because Moon Lee performed the EXACT SAME kick in this movie (because it's so easy right?!)

Enjoyment - 64/100 | A standard and sometimes boring revenge story except for the underground kickboxing match mid-way. That was... an interesting way to develop the villain, I really enjoyed that part. Eventually, the 3rd act happens and lo and behold, this movie hits an home run.

This is a must-watch for martial arts fans in my opinion, but most of the movie itself is average. (by Daxtreme of KFF)

**Kid from Tibet (Hong Kong, 1991: Yuen Biao)** - A lame lawyer named Robinson (RCH) visits Potala Palace in Tibet to see the Dalai Lama. Robinson is there to broker a deal to bring 2 pieces of an artifact, the Babu Gold Bottle, back together. There he encounters a young lama named Wong La (YB), who casually heals Robinson's leg using his chi. After the lawyer leaves, Wong La meets with Saka Lama of the Yellow Division (WM), learning he is to travel to Lhasa to meet the lawyer's assistant, Miss Chiu (MR). He is to bring along the bottle's cap and travel with her to Hong Kong to reunite it with the bottle and then return them to Potala Palace. Saka Lama even divulges to him the mystic curse, via Tibetan magic, that activates the artifact.

However, there is an evil man, the Sorcerer of the Black Division (YW), and his sister (NLC), who desires the magic bottle for themselves. The artifact contains great power and can be used for reincarnation. The sorcerer seeks to use it to rule all esoteric Buddhist sects (which are apparently broken down into 5 color divisions). He and his sister steal it from Mr. Bao, a wealthy old man who has the bottle in his possession and plans to return it to the Tibetan masters.

In Lhasa, Wong La encounters Miss Chiu, whom he is to meet to take the cap to Hong Kong. A chase ensues with thieves trying to rob her and the sorcerer's goons after him. There are some standard action and comedy bits here. Especially comical is the leader of the thieves, who happens to be a rather dapperly dressed midget. When the mini-mobster pulls a pistol, Wong La uses Tibetan magic to cause the gun barrel to bend.

After some high-jinx on arriving at the Hong Kong airport (which include a "blink and you'll miss him" cameo of Jackie Chan), Wong La and Miss Chiu attend Robinson's birthday party. The young lama is asked to perform some Tibetan magic. He begrudgingly does, but his trick goes awry as he's unaware that the sorcerer's sister is in attendance, and she manipulates his feat to create confusion and embarrassment. She then lures him into a car ride, taking him to a tunnel that is under construction.

There she tries to seduce him and find the cap on his person. This scene is rather intriguing as she is dressed all in black with a bedazzled boustier and knee-high boots, and Biao plays the bashful and morally stoic lama quite well. (It's a great acting job because what man could truly resist Nina's coy charms?) When he understands what she's trying to do, a fight ensues. I can't remember ever seeing Nina Li Chi perform fight choreography before, but here she looks to be quite apt, reminding me a little of Joyce Godenzi. Her weapon of choice is a bullwhip. The fight is pretty good, showcasing Biao's agility and kicks; and in one jaw-dropping moment, he headbutts Nina Li's bosom. (How many people can say they've done that and lived to tell?) Ultimately, she is outmatched and resorts to black Buddhist magic to make her escape, failing to get the cap. She leaves a fire in her wake. Wong La, not knowing how to drive, uses Tibetan magic to start and drive the car to safety, wrecking it in a fiery explosion. (I know that sounds odd, but it's exactly what happens.)

Finally making his way back to Miss Chiu's place, where she discovers him roasting himself over an open fire like a rotisserie chicken via Tibetan magic, they go the following morning to Mr. Bao's mansion to reunite the Gold Bottle and its cap. The sorcerer is there, passing himself as Mr. Bao, and when Wong La tries to leave with the complete artifact, a fight ensues pitting the young lama against the sorcerer's 3 goons. This is a classic display of Biao's agility and bootwork. It's exciting to watch. One particular rewatchable moment features of a double kick with a single leg, as he front kicks one thug in the face and brings the same foot down in an axe kick to another thug's head. Still, he resorts to more Tibetan magic, firing energy blasts from his hands at one point and then levitating his foes up in the air to drop them to the floor. Then the sorcerer jumps in, and after a brief skirmish (and the promise of more to come), Wong La and Miss Chiu are captured.

Wong La comes to, his arms outstretched and dangling from chains, in a large unfinished room in the lower reaches of the mansion. Threatened with Miss Chiu's death if he doesn't cooperate, he talks the sorcerer through an incantation to release the Gold Bottle's power. Blue vaporous energy wafts about the room, turning into powerful bolts that zip around, killing the sorcerer's henchmen and his sister. Freeing himself, Wong La recites a spell that bottles the deadly energy once again. Then he and the sorcerer engage in a martial arts battle, at one point summoning their chi and causing barrels to explode. Biao and Wah have at one another in a fantastic fight full of dazzling footwork and physical contortions. The exchanges are fast fluid, and the choreography is a cinematic magic all its own. Is it their best celluloid battle ever? No, but it smokes any of the tripe coming out of Asian cinema today. At the end, they brandish wicked-looking broadswords. Wong La cuts off the sorcerer's right hand, and ultimately thrusts him through.

I have to admit this is only the second time I've watched this movie. When I originally came across it, I'd seen a clip of Biao's film *Kickboxer*, but I didn't know the movie it was taken from. I thought this might be it and snagged it. I

was disappointed on watching it to learn it wasn't the movie I was wanting to see, and thus was not as impressed with it as I am on this second screening. This was Biao's directorial debut, and the end of the film shows segments of him working on it on location, as well as a filmed photo op of the cast and crew with the Dalai Lama himself.

Generally, I'm not a fan of Asian movies showcasing Taoist/Buddhist magic. Most of the ones I've seen have a lot of corny comedy aspects that bore me. The special f/x are usually cheesy (they are here, too). Oh, the props, sets, and costumes are always rather extravagant and look great (they are here, too). The thing that tends to irk me is the use of martial postures and movements. They certainly sell the magical action, and it even makes sense they would be used, but usually there's never any really good fighting, and if there is, it's wire-work-laden. However, I find that *A Kid From Tibet* is right up my alley. It has a few moments that make you smile. The magical aspect of it works without it being the main focus of all the action, and the choreography is fun and awe-inspiring at times to watch. So, if you're a Yuen Biao fan or into hokey Asian magic movies, this is one you'll want to see. I'll certainly be revisiting it, and not waiting 20 years to do so. (by Scott Blasingame)

**Killer, The (Hong Kong, 1989: John Woo)** - Four words:

This.  
Movie.  
Kicks.  
Ass.

Chow Yun-Fat is Jeffrey, a hit man at the top of his profession. During a job at a restaurant/nightclub (where he blows away the target, all his three hundred henchmen, and half of Hong Kong), he accidentally blinds Jennifer, the club's singer, with his muzzle flash. He starts to get protective of her, and after he rescues her from muggers, the two become very close.

He decides to retire after his next hit, which will pay for Jennifer's cornea transplants. But after he offs the next guy, crimelord Tony Wang, he finds himself with two problems: 1) Inspector Lee, the bad-boy cop, ain't gonna let him get away; and 2) Johnnie Wang, Tony's nephew who ordered the hit, wants Jeffrey taken out as security.

Let the bullets fly.

This is one of the John Woo films that made America sit up and say, "Whoa! Why've we been making movies like *Die Hard*?" Woo loads this movie with bullets, fistfights, bullets, explosions, bullets, actual character development, bullets... did I mention bullets? By my rough estimate, there was approximately one firearm discharge per frame of film.

But it's not just shooting. It's watching two men with absolute confidence in their killing abilities. None of this "shoot the enemy once" crap; these guys have a gun in each hand, and load at least four slugs into each target. Gotta make sure he's dead, you know.

Best scene: Jeffrey returns to Jennifer's apartment to find Lee there. Instantly, they each have a gun against the other's jawline. Jennifer wanders out of the kitchen and says, "Jeffrey, is that you? Oh good, you know each other," and the two men proceed to carry on a polite conversation in front of her, never letting her know they're ready to blow each other away.

There's a lot here about honor, too. Lee feels honorbound to bring Jeffrey in, but at the same time he realizes (reluctantly) that they're the same creature on opposite sides of the fence. Sidney, an older hitman who's now a go-between who sets up the hits for the Wang organization, tries to regain his honor after he inadvertently sets Jeffrey up. And Jeffrey finds a better life's work than killing people: Helping the woman he loves.

Sure, a lot of the plot elements sound corny (I didn't realize how badly until I actually wrote the words "eye operation"). But it's a flawless mixture. Part buddy movie, part kung-fu movie (though there's very little martial-art action, it still enjoys that sense of choreography that the best Hong Kong movies share), part spaghetti western, part mob movie... Damn.

The only flaw in my view experience was that niggling feeling that the dubbed dialog wasn't doing the original justice. Several times I said, "I sure hope that sounds less goofy in Cantonese."



Suggest this one next time someone wants to watch the latest Bruce Willis actioner. (by Nathan Shumate of Cold Fusion Video)

**Killer Angels (Hong Kong, 1989: Tony Liu) – aka *Ultra Force*** - Moon Lee and Yuen King-Tan (Abacus Fong from *Wing Chun*) play a pair of elite policewomen called the Angel Squad. They are called in bring in a former gangster named Jackie Chan (Lau Siu-Kwan), who claims to have a list of all of his former associates. While Rosa (Yuen) watches Jackie so that he doesn't get into trouble, Yueli (Moon) goes undercover as a singer at a nightclub owned by the Big Kahuna (Leung Kar-Yan). His top enforcer, Michael (Gordon Liu), has some sort of past with Yueli, but we never exactly find out what it is. The Big Kahuna's daughter and Michael's lover (Fujimi Nadeki, of *Crystal Hunt* and *Cheetah on Fire*) notices and takes a Strong disliking to Yueli. Stuff happens and our characters get in numerous scuffles and firefights until the finale, when our two heroines, joined by a high-kicking female DA's assistant, lead an assault on a skin trafficking deal between the Big Kahuna and some "Middle Easterners" (including a blonde-haired Michael Houghton, student of the late Lau Kar-Leung).

There is quite a bit of action here, although most of it is of the gunplay variety. The fight scenes are generally short, with the final fight between Moon Lee and Leung Kar-Yan, plus a fight between Moon Lee and the female DA, being the two stand-outs. Her fight with Mike Houghton, who uses hung gar as if he had walked out of an old school movie, is sadly really short. The choreography itself, provided by Tsui Fat (of *Crystal Hunt* and *Cheetah on Fire*), is pretty Strong. He makes Fujimi Nadeki look better than she did in those other movies. Gordon Liu doesn't show much of his skills, but he does get to wield a huge honkin' revolver that would make Dirty Harry jealous. The plot is no great shakes, but there's enough 80s style action to keep any HK cinephile happy. (By Blake Matthews)

**Killers from Beijing (Hong Kong, 2000: Bowie Lau)** - If they had shortened this film to an hour running time, this would have been a fairly solid low budget action film. Instead though director Bowie Lau (Electrical Girl) pads the film with lengthy scenes of the actors chewing up the set with melodramatic monologues and long, moody silences. No doubt the actors probably enjoyed these opportunities to show their acting ability, but towards the end there is so much talking – along with one of the longest death scenes in a film this or any year – that you want to just shout out to them to shut up and shoot somebody.

Four friends (Patrick Tam, Chin Kar-lok, Michael Tong and Tuen Wai-lun) are let go from the Chinese army for being a bit rough during training exercises. When Brother Chick (Ma Tak Chung) comes from Hong Kong with a proposition that they kill a rival triad leader, they hesitate before reluctantly accepting. They really want no part of a criminal life, but the promise of a big payoff is one they can't refuse. And a trip to Hong Kong of course!

In Hong Kong they become typical tourists looking to buy good food, cheap vcds and a relaxing hostess bar. It is rather enjoyable watching the scenes of them walking through the streets of Hong Kong because these four actors are recognized by nearly every one they pass by and so everyone in the scene is turning their head and intently watching them. Just four anonymous guys in Hong Kong! Brother Chick introduces them to his boss – Tseung – who is a complete sleaze and not very bright either. Not only did he openly seduce Brother Chick's wife ("We're brothers, what does it matter. She is only a woman"), but he tells the foursome that they are only "dogs I buy" and throws money at them. Probably not the wisest thing to do to four professional killers.

The killing is easy. Walk up the stairs, guns at your side, shoot everyone in slow motion. Like a walk in the park. Don't even raise a sweat. The setting is a negotiating dinner between Tseung and the man they have been paid to kill. They take out their target with a shot to the head – but Tseung is just standing there – much too tempting – like a turkey that doesn't realize that it is Christmas day- much to his surprise they kill him too. The killing is easy – getting back to the Mainland is a different matter. With the cops waiting for them back at their hideout, they begin to realize that maybe someone has sold them out – and soon the chances of getting back home look very remote. Appearing also is Annie Man as Tam's girlfriend, William Ho as the Village Head and Samuel Leung as Worm.

The film has potential – the chemistry between the four friends is good and some of the action is entertaining, but it drags badly at times – it is nearly 45 minutes before the first action scene – and becomes increasingly absurd and unbelievable towards the end. The less than intelligent behavior of the crew becomes a bit irritating as well – with everyone trying to kill them and a boat waiting for them, they stop to buy vcds! Of course, I might be tempted to do the same. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Killer's Romance (Hong Kong, 1990: Philip Ko Fei)** - Based on the Manga cartoon 'Crying Freeman' this actioner is particularly interesting because it is probably the only Hong Kong film ever to be filmed entirely on location in the UK.

Simon Yam plays the adopted son of the head of a Japanese crime syndicate who seeks revenge against the Chinese Triad when his father is murdered. Joey Wong is an innocent bystander who witnesses one of the revenge killings and becomes embroiled in the ensuing gang war.

I was only able to get hold of a dubbed version of this movie so I can't really comment on the acting but the action scenes are all top notch. The gunplay sequences are particularly over the top and bloody. The choreography and camerawork in all of the fight scenes is quite impressive particularly the sword fight ending. Simon Yam doesn't do a bad job at all.

I really liked this movie for the fact that it was filmed in London and is shot against some famous landmarks. I'm amazed that they managed to get permission to shoot an assassination scene actually inside St Paul's Cathedral. The only area where the film is let down is in the car chase scenes. The stunts all seem to have been shot on some waste ground that bears no resemblance to the roads on which you saw the cars driving only a few seconds earlier. This criticism aside, Killers Romance is still a highly enjoyable film. (by John Richards of Wasted Life)

**King of Comic, The (Taiwan, 1996: Kevin Chu Yen-Ping)** - A bizarre action-comedy starring Ng Man-Tat as a private detective who happens upon a baby in a back alley (the baby grows up and is played by Kok Siu-Man). The plot also involves Nicky Wu as the son of a crime lord who insists that Nicky produce an heir for him. More a collection of scenes than an actual movie, this movie will bore even the most ardent Nicky Wu fan. The movie would have benefited from more scenes developing Nicky's character and less scenes of Kok Siu-Man doing his boring "cute-kid" schtick for the camera. This movie ranks a 51 out of 100. One hilarious and imaginative scene involving Nicky Wu buying underwear saves it from being a total failure. (by Sleung of HKMDB)

**King of Gambler (Hong Kong, 1991: Johnnie Kong)** - A Triad gang is recruited by an unscrupulous Japanese terrorist mastermind (Lung Fong), posing as a gambler, to assist in a high stakes gambling match. Although ostensibly seeking to reverse loss of face for an earlier defeat by a female American gambler with special sensory powers, this plan is actually concerned with raising money for a Japanese terrorist cell. The fiancé (Lin Wei) of the HK Triad boss's daughter (Kathy Chow) pits his special sensory powers against the American contender, who is actually in league with the Japanese terrorists. When his future father-in-law (Roy Chiao) is killed and fiancée is kidnapped, he and Alex Man (the Triad boss's son) take revenge.

The action at levels in this film is so exaggerated that all dramatic effect is squandered. The gambling match involves stakes of US \$700 million. The mass slaughters of the Triad family by American gunmen at a garden party, of the gunmen in a hotel suite, and of the neatly suited Japanese terrorists involve scything down dozens of people in waves by machine gun fire. They literally run en masse into the line of fire. Lack of dramatic tension renders the characters and sub-plots so unreal that it's hard to care about the outcome.

Michiko, appearing in a cameo role, breaks a sweat as the Japanese gambler initially defeated by the American with special powers. Unfortunately she doesn't have much to do other than look great in a traditional kimono. Her entire appearance is a cameo, presented on a videotaped review of the card game. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**King of the Kickboxers (USA, 1990: Lucas Lowe) – aka No Retreat, No Surrender 4** - One thing I am sure confuses a number of fans of action movies is why martial art sequences in western movies have, for the most part, been greatly inferior to any typical martial art sequence in an Asian movie. Even the cheapest Asian movies usually have much better fight choreography and editing than in western movies costing ten to a hundred times more. Of course, there are a lot of answers that immediately come to mind that answer a large part of this. The most obvious one is that the martial arts are not only a significant part of Asian culture, but have been so for hundreds of years - they've had a lot of time to practice and improve on their art for an audience constantly demanding more for their buck. Also, some aspects of Asian moviemaking give filmmakers more leeway - unlike their western counterparts, they are often able to spend weeks or even months to shoot a fight sequence. While those facts certainly answer a lot of the question, they also inevitably add to the mystery by prompting some new and equally obvious questions. Like: Why don't western film companies very often hire Asians who are skilled in making great fight scenes? And the few times they *do* hire Asians, why don't they leave them alone instead of heavily influencing them to make the fights more "western"? And why do the major Hollywood distributors hardly ever go to the trouble to simply find an

Asian movie with great fights, buy the rights to it (for what would probably be considered peanuts), and release it to theaters on these shores?

I personally spent some time thinking about all of this, and I eventually came to an ugly conclusion that, much as I tried, couldn't in the end disprove. I remembered an article I read several years ago that contained an interview with action director/producer James Glickenhaus. Part of the article concerned his 1985 movie *The Protector*, which Jackie Chan starred in as an attempt to break into the western market. If you've seen it, most likely you agree with Chan that it was a terrible movie; in fact, Chan not only reshot a good portion of it for the Asian market when he returned to Hong Kong, he immediately afterwards made the vastly superior *Police Story* as a kind of comeuppance to Glickenhaus. Anyway, Glickenhaus defended the way he directed *The Protector*, saying in effect that Chan's way was well and good, but the western market wouldn't go for it. And unfortunately, evidence seems to suggest he was right. Look at how Chan's Hong Kong movies have done here; *Rumble At The Bronx* did okay (certainly not blockbuster business), but subsequently the other theatrically released ones (like *Supercop* or *The Legend Of Drunken Master*) fared pretty poorly. Yet his inferior American-made movies like *The Tuxedo* and *Rush Hour* have fared much better! And it's not just with Chan. For example, few people here seemed interested in seeing Jet Li's Hong Kong movie *Black Mask*, but they showed a lot more interest in seeing him in the inferior western movies *Kiss Of The Dragon* and *The One*.

From this and other evidence (like how the box office hit *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* happened to have major American involvement), the ugly conclusion I've come to is that the majority of North Americans can be considered xenophobic ignoramuses - they seem to think not only that a "good film" has to have a big budget and be made by Americans, but more often than not has to be western in its style as well. (You can safely count yourself out of this group if you're a regular reader of this site, since it shows you have at least some taste for movies not in the mainstream.) On the positive side, things are changing, albeit slowly. At least Asian stars like Chan and Li are recognized by the general population. Martial art stuntmen and fight choreographers like Cory Yuen are being hired to work on western films. And Hong Kong filmmakers are getting more of their product seen by westerners, even if it's just a straight-to-video release. Part of that's because they are making their movies more marketable by hiring American stars; recently we've had *China Strike Force* (with Mark Dacascos and Coolio), and David Morse appearing in *Double Vision*. But ten years earlier, the Seasonal Film Corporation was already doing this kind of thing, getting several of their movies released to American video stores as a result. *King Of The Kickboxers* may be the most entertaining of them all.

As it happened, the producers decided to hire a predominately western cast for *King Of The Kickboxers*, unlike most such productions that settle for one or two foreign actors. Among the supporting players are Richard Jaeckel (*The Dirty Dozen*) and Don Stroud (*Death Weekend*). The villain is played by a then-unknown Billy Blanks (*Back In Action*), and the top-billed Loren Avedon (*No Retreat No Surrender 3*) was also a relative newcomer when he appeared in the movie. He plays Jake Donohue, a cop who seems to be a close cousin to Tony Saitta. No, he doesn't shove hot curling irons into the butts of people, but he will shove hot *electric heaters* into the *faces* of people, while screaming "Does that hurt, huh? GOOD!" This kind of behavior pisses off his captain (Jaeckel), but Jake gets him to quickly calm down by using the reliable technique all tough cops use in justifying their brutality: By saying, "My methods get results!" This seems to explain why his captain subsequently tells him that Interpol is in need of Jake's martial art skills. Seems that in Thailand there is a criminal outfit hiring foreign martial artists to star in martial art films, and the foreigners don't find out until the camera is rolling that they don't fake the death scenes. Watching one of the movies, Jake is startled to find out that the company's regular star is Khan (Blanks) - the same man who killed his brother ten years earlier after he refused to take a dive in a championship bout. But Jake keeps silent about this, and becomes determined to do whatever it takes to get face to face with Kahn and avenge his brother's death.

Even with that vengeance angle, you have probably already guessed correctly that *King Of The Kickboxers* proves to be a very silly movie at times. Take that whole snuff movie operation, for example. Though they shoot with what appears to be video cameras, they have everything else a movie shoot would have - spotlights, a full crew, even elaborate sets. And if one of their victims should refuse to perform, they have on hand a bunch of goons dressed exactly like the Blues Brothers to shoot warning shots. All this effort and expense is justified with someone mentioning there's supposedly a big market in Asia for movies where westerners are seen getting killed. (Well, movies like *Faces Of Death* have proved to be popular in that part of the world.) That interest may be understandable, given Jake's way of investigating once he reaches Thailand. His first step is to find a kickboxing school, insult everyone there, and beat the crap out of several students before walking away and muttering, "What a f\*cking waste of time!" (Perhaps Jake is also related to Giorga of *The Violent Professionals*.) To be fair, it's shown to be a tough world; it's one where just about everyone seems to know martial arts, even small-time New York drug mobsters who look like Rod Stewart's baby brother. And speaking of lookalikes, one of the snuff film producers, always seen cuddling up to a woman, has a remarkable similarity to Russ Meyer.

But as funny as many of these and other isolated moments are in the movie, none can compare to the hilarity that comes from Avedon's performance. His acting isn't merely bad, it's positively surreal. He shouts about half of his dialogue, even in scenes of a less intense nature, such as the subplot involving the woman (Sherrie Rose, *Black Scorpion*) he meets and gets romantically involved with. Speaking of shouting, he also has a couple of solitary moments when he shrieks with agony over the hurt of his past. You might think these particular scenes possibly couldn't be overacted, but Avedon somehow manages to do it. But whether he's shouting or not, Avedon goes though most of the movie with an "I'm such a *cool/badass!*" attitude that is positively arrogant - however, this attitude is just so unbelievably overdone that you can't get annoyed by it, because you are laughing too hard. In fairness to Avedon, it seems that his outlandish performance came more from the encouragement of the director than himself; there are a couple of moments when things get quiet and serious enough that give Avedon the opportunity to show that he can act pretty well if encouraged to do so. But I have to admit that I probably wouldn't have found *King Of The Kickboxers* as entertaining as it is now if Avedon *had* been made to give a good performance. It certainly fits better with the other ridiculous things that the movie has on display.

Avedon is at least given the opportunity to display his physical talents, more so than if he were on an American film. It's customary for actors to do their own stuntwork on Asian movies, this one being no exception. During the intense training montage that inevitably happens in movies like this, we get to see Avedon doing tricky things like doing the splits while standing on two rafts in a pond, or strung up in agonizing positions way up a tree with weights tied to his limbs. He also holds his own in all of his fight sequences, which are choreographed in that classic Asian style that beats the western way any day of the week. A lot of this is simply having the participants in the fight move faster, as well as making more elaborate moves, but there's more to it than that. For one thing, the camera stays focused on the participants on each shot for a longer period of time on average - no quick-cutting to artificially add energy or to mask fight inability by any the participants. The camera also tends to show all or most of the participants' full bodies in any one shot, so the fight can be seen at full effect. (This also happens to be the technique that's generally successful in making song-and-dance movies.) Lastly, the participants are often made to fight in environments that force them to fight differently, but also get them to use the environment to their advantage. A garage is a cramped place, but also has various instruments you can pick up to your advantage. A staircase can give you handy high ground, but an opponent can go under it and grab your feet.

This creative way the movie has of giving the fighter's places to battle leads up to the movie's best scene, the climatic bout between Jake and Khan. Most likely inspired by *Max Max Beyond Thunderdome*, it takes place inside a gigantic wooden dome with several platforms of different heights, and with sharpened bamboo stakes sticking out of the water below. Though the fight may be considered a little short by fight aficionados, it otherwise delivers everything a final cinematic fight should have, high-kicking stunts, brutality, and a feeling of real struggle. A bonus asset the fight has is the time the movie spent previously into building Jake's opponent into a menacing and dangerous foe. As Khan, Billy Blanks is a fantastic villain. He doesn't have that much dialogue, and the little he speaks admittedly does come out a little clownish because of that same direction affecting Avedon's performance. But otherwise, he's one scary dude, gnashing his teeth, veins pulsing out of his muscled body, and looking *really* intense. And every kick and blow comes across as serious business, even in slow motion. It's too bad that Blanks seems to have left the film world behind for Tae-Bo; if there's any real disappointment to come from seeing *King Of The Kickboxers*, it's from that realization. (by Keith Bailey of the Unknown Movies)

**King Swindler (Taiwan, 1993: Kevin Chu Yen-Ping) - aka Return of the Fat Dragon** - Sammo Hung plays a former fighter who's down on his luck, who has turned to gambling for a living. His wife left him, and he uses his son as a dupe to help him cheat and win card games. When he gets busted in a sting, the arresting female officer (Sandra Ng Kwun-Yu) takes his son to live with her and her little boy. The 2 kids become fast friends while Sammo is incarcerated. Once he's released, Sammo decides to try fighting again. When the boys are kidnapped, he's forced to take a dive or else.

Fight #1 --- Sammo vs Cops posing as gamblers - A short but powerful fight! There's a nice bit where Sammo jerks a guy's leg across a table in order to give him a roundhouse kick to the head.

Fight #2 --- Sammo vs Gamblers - Best fight!!! Sammo showcases a little Drunken style, not a lot but some. The choreography here doesn't appear to be under-cranked, and it would have helped the flow of things, but there are little moments of ingenuity throughout that are pretty cool. It wraps up with Sammo pulling off a short series of kicks that displays the Fat Dragon's agility.

Fight #3 --- Underground Fight #1 - Nothing special to had here. It's just some give and take, and Sammo wins.

Fight #4 --- Underground Fight #2 - This is super short, but really good, culminating in Sammo's patented side kick.

Fight #3 --- Underground Fight #3 - This, unfortunately, is not what it could have been. The fight is interspersed with the kids' antics while trying to escape their kidnappers (think "Home Alone"). Meanwhile, Sammo's just taking a beating. Suddenly the kids are free, and show up with the cops. Sammo rallies and defeats his opponent with half a dozen blows and a double-footed flying kick.

This is a rather hard movie to sit through. It's more comedy than action, and the action isn't very lengthy. Much of the comedy is hammy and rather juvenile. I didn't laugh once. It borrows certain bits from other films, too. (There's the "Home Alone" bit I referenced, and a "Rocky" like segment of Sammo running through town.) There are 3 musical numbers, and one is a song set to young love between children that I find to be wholly out of place, to the point it makes me cringe.

I don't want to say it's bad, but it's not good. How "not good" is it? Apparently it's so "not good" that many of the characters don't even warrant names. You're left to sort that out for yourself. The kids are annoying. The characters of Sammo and his love interest/female cop aren't anyone you feel like rooting for. To top it all off, the fight choreography starts out strong, but then weakens throughout the film. Yikes! Yes, it is that "not good".

I'll tell you now, this is one for Sammo fans only because...well, it's Sammo. Completionists will want to see it. Anyone else? *It's your call*, but he has way better films than this. (by Scott Blasingame)

**Kung Fu Kids (Taiwan, 1986: Kevin Chu Yen-Ping, Chang Mei-Chung) - aka Young Dragons: Kung Fu Kids** - Here's a fun way to kick off a children's comedy... with a montage of Hong Kong film stars that succumbed to suicide, drug overdose or accidental death. Fun, right? After sobering images of the likes of Linda Lin Dai, Bruce Lee, comedian Hui Bat-Liu and Alexander Fu Sheng, our somber narrator abruptly changes tone: "Stars pass on. But don't get too depressed! 1986 sees the birth of three great new stars!" Cut to the cheeky opening credits presenting our three fresh-faced young leads who try their utmost to leap, kick, punch, flip and mug their way into the hearts of martial arts film fans everywhere. Somehow it worked. For despite that wildly inappropriate intro and frankly shoddy quality of what follows, *Young Dragons: Kung Fu Kids* was a huge hit that spawned five sequels.

Meet Ah Kuo (Aan Jing-Kwok), Hsiao Yu (Cho Hau-Foo) and Fatty (Chan Shung-Wing), who if you hadn't guessed is a little on the porky side. Three country bumpkin kids living in a remote rural area with their cantankerous Grandpa (Chan Wai-Lau). Between forcing his grandchildren to do back-breaking farm work, the old git also teaches them kung fu. His lessons take the form of Pink Panther-style sneak attacks wherein he punches Ah Kuo in the face, jumps on Hsiao Yu's back and beats Fatty with a stick then repeatedly farts on each of them. The hardship doesn't stop there. At dinner time Grandpa makes the boys fight him for a bowl of rice, which he always snatches away prior to punishing them with another humiliating fart in the face. Beyond beat-downs and face farts, Grandpa also administers pearls of Confucian wisdom about the importance of defending the weak, standing up for what is right, and that all women are devils: "Don't watch 'em. Don't touch 'em. Don't trust 'em!"

Alas, as all children grow to realize, these wacky fun times of slave labour, relentless physical abuse, caustic flatulence and 'hilarious' misogyny don't last forever. One day Ah Kuo, Hsiao Yu and Fatty discover Grandpa's beloved pet bird (whom they all hate with a passion. Presumably because it gets all the kindness and love he withholds from them) has flown away because they forgot to shut its cage. Theorizing no doubt that the old man might be mad enough to move beyond his daily fart tactics and actually take a full-on disciplinary dump on them, the boys escape to the city. Totally clueless about big city life, but handy with their fists, the boys bumble from one mess into another, trashing a restaurant, causing chaos in a shopping mall before mistakenly serving as drug couriers (!) for a triad gang run by a cartoonish mob boss and his sidekick Jacko whose flamboyant outfit looks like a black checkered Super Mario costume. In other words: badass.

Anyway, 'hilarious' misunderstandings ensue before the boys realize they made a mistake, beat up the triads and escape. Whereupon a far-fetched twist unexpectedly reunites them with their long-lost Grandma (Tan Ai-Chen) and little sister Ching-Ching. They live in a luxurious mansion having ditched stubborn city-hating old Grandpa years ago. Oddly at no point in the movie does anyone mention the children's parents. They probably had their fill of the old man's flatulent discipline a while back and happily abandoned their charmless family to start afresh elsewhere. Can't say I blame them. Anyway, Ching-Ching proves something of a pampered princess. Grandma probably didn't fart on her enough. But she soon warms to her brothers especially after she is kidnapped by Jacko and the other triads, forcing our young dragons to spring into action.

Fans of Chen Kaige's near-universally acclaimed art-house drama *Farewell, My Concubine* (1993) owe no small debt to *Young Dragons: Kung Fu Kids*. It was the lucrative success of this steadfastly lowbrow children's film series that

enabled actress-turned-producer Hsu Feng, one-time star of King Hu's seminal martial arts masterpiece *A Touch of Zen* (1969), to bankroll that lavish Oscar-nominated epic. There had been child stars in martial arts cinema going as far back as Fung Bo-Bo, the so-called Shirley Temple of Hong Kong in the 1960s. Occasional oddball fantasies like *Silver Maid* (1970) and *The Dwarf Sorcerer* (1974) showcased the remarkable skills of child acrobats that were also a staple of Chinese stage-shows. But the genre really took off after *Young Dragons: Kung Fu Kids* paved the way for a host of sequels and imitators. Both in Hollywood (e.g. *3 Ninjas* (1992) and *Surf Ninjas* (1993)) and Hong Kong including *Lucky Seven* (1986) and the popular *Shaolin Popeye* franchise. Interestingly while mere mention of the latter two is enough to arouse the ire of the average martial arts film fan, opinions on *Young Dragons* have traditionally leaned towards the favourable. Much of this is down to the undeniable athleticism of the three leads which is nothing short of remarkable. Their acrobatic prowess and skill with that most parentally-despised martial arts weapon: the nunchakus no doubt made them envy of playgrounds across Asia and beyond.

But aside from the physical gifts of the child stars and a jaw-dropping finale wherein they basically parody every Bruce Lee-inspired kung fu film trope from the Seventies, *Young Dragons: Kung Fu Kids* is charmless pap. While the attempts at slapstick humour prove merely irksome, its muddled moralizing is often downright offensive. Certainly veteran Taiwanese schlockmeister Chu Yen Ping brings a degree of filmmaking skill to a sub-genre more often lacking in finesse. His fluid camera-work and dynamic editing keep things fast and furious even when gags are misfiring at an alarming rate. The film certainly reflects cultural differences between East and West not just when it comes to humour but regarding childcare and deference towards elders. One imagines many western viewers would find Grandpa's absurdly harsh treatment of the boys not far from child abuse. Yet the fact is many stuntmen active in the Hong Kong or Taiwanese film industry were raised much the same way. Most likely not on the receiving end of farts as punishment. Still harsh discipline played a key role in shaping their martial arts skills. To some degree the film does capture that strange mix of resentment and respect common in relationships between young people and the elderly in many Asian households. Even if it does not make it palatable to foreign tastes. If Grandpa's efforts to impart some highly dubious views on women strike a sour note early on, happily the boys rapidly discover he is wrong. Pretty much every city woman they encounter is kind, patient, helpful and polite. Er, save perhaps the one woman they slap in the face upon mistaking her mole for a fly, but that's understandable.

To Chu Yen Ping's credit, the film does take the time to craft something almost akin to a Voltaire-like social satire wherein almost every one of Grandpa's windy life lessons proves no use in the 'real world.' By adhering to a half-baked martial arts code, the boys routinely misjudge ordinary decent people and end up embroiled with a bunch of tough-talking triads. Still, the film misses a trick by failing to include any scenes where the boys actually learn from their mistakes and start treating people right. The only city dweller to whom they exhibit any respect is their grandma, which instead of teaching them the importance of kindness reinforces an unfortunate conservative notion that the only people one need ever be nice to is family. Still most fans are willing to look past the muddled morality for the sake of scenes where the kung fu kids take on perennial punching bag Eugene Thomas (in a parody of Bruce Lee's face-off with Kareem Abdul Jabbar in *Game of Death* (1978)), bite the legs of Japanese kendo warriors and grab grown men by the balls. (by Andrew Pragasam of The Spinning Image)

**Kung Fu Kids II (Taiwan, 1986: Chen Chi-Hwa)** - After the success of the first official film of the series, the kids move to the city where they must learn the local habits and go to school in a kind of disjointed sketches (first part of the movie) and finally fight against Dick Wei and his henchmen! If you can bear the unbearable kiddie gags (75% of the movie) in exchange you will see excellent martial stunts, some of them performed by Yen Chin Kwok and Cho Ha Foo (years later converted in action director) themselves. It's evident the kids are not rivals for Wei, but anyway they do a decent job. The final fight in the Casino is almost apothecic, as you can expect from an expert stunt director as Chen Chi Hwa, but unfortunately, as always, "fatty" Chen Shun Yun spoils part of the action. Believe it or not, this was one of the Taiwanese major box office hits of the 80s around the world. (by Carlos of HKMDB)

**Kung Fu Kids III (Taiwan, 1987: Lin Fu-Ti) - Aka Young Dragons: Kung Fu Kids 3** - In 1986, Kevin Chu Yen-Ping, the demented director of such fare as *Fantasy Mission Force* and *Island of Fire*, hit pay dirt with *Kung Fu Kids*, which ended up being a huge success worldwide (possibly one of the most popular Taiwanese films before *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*?). Naturally, a sequel came out in short order, and pitted the kids against Dick Wei, of all people. Both of those films were infantile comedies with smatterings of well-choreographed fight scenes, set in the modern day. The following year, a second sequel was made. Despite the poster, which suggests more of the same, this is a surprisingly-somber melodrama set in the Republic Era of China.

Fatty (Chen Chung-Jung) lives with his father and stepmother, the latter of whom barely tolerates him. When she gives birth to her first child, Fatty leaves home in search for his mother, who disappeared when he was a baby. He shows up at a neighboring city and falls in with a kung fu pickpocket (Yan Tseng-Kuo), whose guardian trains street orphans to steal. Those two get into some hijinks and end up getting accepted into a Peking Opera Troupe, ran by

an aging Tien Feng. Their rival there is Tiger (Tso Hsiao-Hu, also known as Jet Le), a highly-acrobatic kid on the troupe. Tiger and Pickpocket initially dislike each other, but slowly become friends.

The three friends get into numerous conflicts, sometimes with each other, sometimes with those closest to them, and sometimes with their own personal demons. At one point, Pickpocket's master kidnaps the daughter of a rich guy and hopes to get rich off the ransom. In another scene, Tien Feng accuses Tiger of stealing, only to find out that Tiger has been saving money on the sly to pay off his indentured servitude with the troupe. Finally, the three flee the city during a bombing (the Japanese? A rival warlord?) and take to the countryside with a mute woman (Yue Siu-Fan), who eventually turns out to be Fatty's mother.

If one were to guess from the opening twenty minutes, you'd think that this would be a typical Kung Fu Kids film simply transplanted to the 1920s (or thereabouts). There's some wallet-stealing hijinks and stuff like that, but that quickly gives way to overwrought melodrama and some heavy themes for what should be a jokey kids film. Each of the three kids attempt suicide at some point, for example. The most poignant example is Tiger, where he's brutally whipped by Tien Feng because of the aforementioned money fiasco, and then goes onstage and proceeds to perform somersaults in place for about two minutes straight before passing out. It's obvious from the context that his intention was going to try to force himself to do that until his heart stopped.

There are also themes of kidnapping, exploiting children, and lots of child abuse on display. Pickpocket is frequently severely beaten by his master, who exploits all the children under his "care." Tien Feng frequently hits Tiger, which, as we now know, was very common in the Peking Opera environment. When Tiger gets his caning, the camera doesn't shy away from showing his bloodied back covered with deep lacerations. I think "kids movies" in the past twenty years or so have become increasingly childish, shying away from dealing with themes that might generate a dialog between parents and children about them. Whether or not *Kung Fu Kids III* is the place to bring up these subjects, I'm not sure. But I don't think you could ever make a *Three Ninjas* movie back in the 90s that explored some of the more disturbing aspects of family life and adolescence.

Speaking of *Three Ninjas*, the fight choreography was provided by Lam Man-Cheung, best known for *Black City; Death Games*; and *The Three Ninjas Knuckle Up*. There aren't many fights, though. Early on, lead actors Yan Tseng-Kuo and Tso Hsiao-Hu have a fight on stilts that's reminiscent of *Ninja in the Dragon's Den*, which is rather impressive given the age of the participants. A little later, the same actors have a Peking Opera competition performing acrobatics and some short-lived fisticuffs. After that, the martial arts on display is limited to a couple of Peking Opera shows. There is no main villain, or climatic fight, in this movie, though. I honestly thought that Pickpocket's guardian would become the main villain, but his subplot is resolved at around the hour mark...with only a punch or two thrown. DISAPPOINTING!!!

Yeah, there isn't much reason to watch this film unless you're a *Kung Fu Kids* completist or something of the sort. It's not a bad movie, and it honestly tries to be more than an action film with children, but the *Kung Fu Kids* banner was not the right place to do a coming of age film set in period. (by Blake Matthews)

**Kung Fu Kids IV (Taiwan, 1987: Chang Peng-I)** - After a strange and unwelcome detour into period melodrama with *Kung Fu Kids III*, the next sequel takes us back to familiar territory, albeit with a time travel twist to it. Not only does it involve time travel, but one the characters doing the time travel thing is none other than Huo Yuan-Jia, 30 years before *Kung Fu Big League* did the same thing!

In the late Qing Dynasty, a group of Japanese martial artists led by Lung Tien-Hsiang (*Sword Stained with Royal Blood* and *Five Element Ninjas*) are terrorizing the countryside, taking down kung fu school signboards and killing their students. The Japanese go after Master Huo, father of the legendary of Huo Yuanjia (played by Tso Hsiao-Hu, who would show up in *City of Darkness* a decade later). Little Huo goes to his teacher, a Taoist sorcerer, to help him prepare for a forthcoming duel with the Japanese. The sorcerer casts a spell that opens a time tunnel that transports Huo across time (and space) from Southern China circa 1880 to modern day Taiwan.

Meanwhile, a paramilitary outfit led by The General (Paul Chang Cheng, of *Eight Hundred Heroes* and *Kung Fu vs. Yoga*) is testing a new secret weapon: a laser gun. When the General tries to test it on the very scientist who made, the scientist steals the crystal that powers the weapon and makes a run for it. He gets shot by guards while escaping from their underground compound, but makes it onto the grounds of a neighboring summer camp for children before dying. He entrusts the crystal to Fatso (Cheng Chung-Jung) and Aqua (Yan Tseng-Kuo), who have just ran into Huo, before dying. Fatso and Aqua dismiss Huo as a kid who watches too many kung fu movies, and send him on his way.

So the General's men start harassing the kids in search of Huo, since he had left his jacket on the scientist before he died. Aqua figures out that Huo really is who he says he is, after looking at posters for *Alien* and *My Science Project* and having an epiphany about time tunnels (I swear I'm not making this up). They rescue him from the General's men and take him to their place, where their kung fu teacher and grandfather is a master of the same style as Huo's. He begins to train all three of them. Plus, there's a young inventor (David Wu, of *Tiger Cage 2* and *In the Line of Duty V*) and his robot assistant who might be able to harness the power of the crystal to open the time tunnel again.

Yeah, it's nonsense. But it's fairly-entertaining nonsense, mixing old school kung fu tropes with science fiction and the usual kids acting bratty hijinks. Less patient viewers may get a bit antsy during the first hour, where the fighting is restrained and short, but I'm sure that the 3 Ninjas never had a film where a young Hattori Hanzo gets transported to their time to train with Victor Wong.

The action is once more provided by Taiwanese dynamo Lam Maang-Cheung. He really cuts loose during the last half hour, with four big set pieces for our child stars—and the guy who plays their grandfather (Lung Hsiung, perhaps?), to really shine. The first big fight is at David Wu's workshop, as the General's men show up to kidnap our heroes. The fighting is left in the hands of Tso Hsiao-Hu and Yan Tseng-Kuo, as David Wu's character is a thinker, not a fighter. Tso does some nice acrobatic kicks, including a butterfly spin-followed-by-a-spin kick that he's done in other films.

In the next sequence, Yan Tseng-Kuo and his grandfather invade the General's secret hideout to rescue the others. Yan fights with an umbrella for much of this fight, while the grandfather (and his stunt double?) go wicked with the shapes and kicks. They eventually free the others, and Tso Hsiao-Hu also gets up in on the madness. Another fight breaks out at a construction site as the heroes are preparing the time tunnel to transport Huo Yuanjia back to his time (and place). The grandpa goes nuts with the neck breaking and throat collapsing during this skirmish.

The finale is set in period, as our three young heroes take on the Japanese fighters. Yan Tseng-Kuo takes on a bunch of fighters armed with swords and spears and holds his own, without any weapons. Tso Hsiao-Hu takes on the lead Japanese fighter, armed with a naginata. Tso actually whips out the nunchaku briefly, but mainly relies on his aerial kicks to win. And Fatso is a comic foil as always, taking on a Japanese fighter with a remote-controlled car. In the end, our heroes are victorious, Aqua and Fatso go back to the present, but end up in the annals of kung fu history forever. (by Blake Matthews)

**Kung Fu Kids V: Adventure of the Kung Fu Kids (Taiwan, 1988: Chou Tang, Lam Maang-Cheung)** - One thing about the *Kung Fu Kids* outings is that they never really repeat themselves. Part three was a Republic-era melodrama. Part four was action-comedy tomfoolery about time travel and lasers. Part five takes us back to the Republic era, but becomes something akin to the 2008 film *The Champions*, but rather what it'd be like had Wong Jing directed in the late 80s/early 90s. This is one of the crassest kids films I've ever seen, although darned if I didn't laugh out loud a few times.

We open with a brief history of China, starting with the Boxer Rebellion (featuring a guy in drag as the Empress Dowager) and leading up the Republic Era and Chinese civil war, when warlords mercilessly slaughtered common folk in bids for power. One such warlord, Commander Su, is trying to finagle a loan from the foreign powers, but they're reluctant because Chinese are weak people, or so they say. So, Commander Su strikes a deal with them saying that if he can beat the foreigners in a Western-style Olympic games, they'll give him the loan he wants.

So, what about the most powerful people in China. Names like Big Blade Wang Wu (from *Iron Bodyguard* and *Blade of Fury*) and Swallow Li (Yuen Biao's character from *Hero of Swallow*) are dropped, but are unavailable. So, Commander Su sends his men to round up the best athletes they can find. That includes a fat guy and his little friend (Chen Chung-Jung), a young pork vendor (Yan Tseng-Kuo), a petty thief (Tso Hsiao-Hu), all the local prostitutes ("You're good on your backs, so we'll make you good on your feet!"), and some other yahoos, too. They are to be trained by the first Chinese man to receive a diploma in Physical Education: Amadeus, International Director of Sports (put the first letters together...).

The movie is a constant barrage of jokes and sight gags, many of which you could never put in a children's film in the States. Some gags are familiar and family friendly, like the hug-and-kiss joke from *Drunken Master* and the spaghetti gag from *Project A*, which are recycled here. But then you have a prostitute who is constantly accused of being a man because of her flat chest, a newly-created Eunuch who keeps his severed (and miniscule) testicles in a box that he keeps on his person, one contestant who's gay, and lots of other things. Amadeus tries to teach gymnastics to the prostitutes, lying on the ground and using his hands like the handles of the pommel horse—but he just wants a nice view of their crotch.



My favorite joke is during the competition, when Tso Hsiao-Hu participates in the javelin throw. While the judge is still measuring the distance of the European contestant's javelin, Tso hurls his. The javelin strikes the judge in the chest, who staggers back and finally collapses at a distance further than the European guy. Tso wins the event!

There are a handful of fight scenes in this. The best one is a fight early on between Yan Tseng-Kuo and a local extortion gang. It starts out almost as an old school shapes fight, but quickly becomes more of a modern 80s fight, full of acrobatics, painful falls through anything that can break, great kicks, and even some basic pole fighting from our hero. He even does the meat cleaver bit from *Drunken Master* during the fight. Tso Hsiao-Hu is introduced in a scene where he tries to rob a Peking Opera, and ends up on stage in full makeup and regalia. He gets into a kerfuffle with three performers armed with spears, whom he fends off with a broadsword. It starts off as a traditional Peking Opera performance, but gradually turns into an acrobatic kung fu stand-off, with some nice weapons choreography that recalls *The Fearless Hyena* and *Snake and Crane Arts of Shaolin*.

The climax is a big race, but preceding it is a food fight like in *Project A*. Of course, it escalates into a huge brawl, complete with people breaking chairs over their opponents, people falling on chairs and tables, and people getting bottles broken over their heads. Both Yan and Tso do all sorts of crazy acrobatics and kicking during the fight, and despite being children, take a few licks as well. And I mean that they fall through furniture in painful-looking ways, too. And the filmmakers even find ways to throw in erection jokes with people getting jabbed in the head with logs (don't ask) for good measure.

Despite being a *Kung Fu Kids* film, it's really an ensemble comedy. The kids do participate in the competition and generally win in their respective events, and are the most talented fighters, too. But there's so much more going on than just their stories. It's screwy, it's vulgar and it's crass, but I admit it was kind of fun to watch, too. (by Blake Matthews)

**Kung Fu Kids VI: Enter the Young Dragon (Taiwan, 1989: Lam Maang-Cheung)** - I'm assuming this is a sequel to the first two Kung Fu Kids in terms of continuity. A group of killers working for a Caucasian criminal named Scorpion (George Nicholas, of *Ninja in the USA* and *Ninja Condors*) try to steal a gold necklace from a woman (Fu Sing-Tak). The necklace contains a map to a famed Golden Buddha, hidden somewhere in Taiwan. The necklace falls into the hands of the Fatty, Ah Kuo and Tiger. The bad guys kidnap their uncle and take him to Thailand. The Kung Fu Kids team up with the woman and her brother, Blackie (Chang Yi-Teng), to rescue their uncle and find the treasure.

Fight Scene Breakdown:

Fight #1 – Fu Sing-Tak vs. killers – Fu, who looks like a Taiwanese Sibelle Hu (but with better fighting skills), fights a muscular Chinese guy (Charles Hsu, of *Island of Fire* and *Little Shaolin Monk*) in her apartment. He spends the fight throwing her through tables and cabinets in the most painful way possible. She escapes and fights several more bad guys waiting for her on the street. She fights on and around a motorcycle, before a motorcycle/car chase reminiscent of Operation Condor commences. Vehicular stunts were orchestrated by Chen Chun-Kun, who also worked on *Silver Hawk* and *Island of Greed*.

Fight #2 – The Snake Competition – This is a sport competition similar in spirit to the games we saw in *Dragon Lord*. The objective of the game to grab a live cobra and run with it over some obstacles, climb up a platform, and tie the snake to the flag. Of course, the opposing teams can beat each other up in order to wrest the cobra away from whomever has it. The three Kung Fu Kids participate in this competition, against a 3-man team from Hong Kong and a 3-man team from Thailand. Lots of brutal falls, flips, kicks, throws, and take downs. The kids, especially Yan and Tso, take more than their fair share of lumps in this sequence.

Fight #3 – KFK and Fu Sing-Tak vs. killers – The bad guys show up at a celebratory dinner to steal the necklace from Fatty, but a huge fight breaks out. Fu Sing-Tak beats up some low-level henchmen armed with short swords, but gets kicked around by Choi Chung-Chau (*Sun Dragon* and *Kung Fu Executioner*). Tso and Yan step in and join the fracas. Yan acrobatically beats up the henchmen, all of whom to HK spins onto tables and chairs, while Tso goes one on one with Choi. Nice 80s kickboxing choreography here.

Fight #4 – Tso Hsiao-Hu vs. Lau Hon-Hing – Lau Hon-Hing, one of the film's fight choreographers, challenges Tso to a duel, each of them wielding a sort of tonfa/gauntlet and a metal bar. Very good escrima-like choreography, occasionally broken up by a spin kick or butterfly spin. There is some Donnie Yen style undercranking here, but the choreography is killer.

Fight #5 – Yan Tseng-Kuo vs. Thai fighters – Yan takes on a pair of Krabi-krabong fighters in two consecutive sword fights. Some good swordplay here and in a funny "twist," Yan gets taken out by the second fighter, a woman.

Fight #6 – Warehouse Fight – Our heroes take on the bad guys while rescuing their uncle. Tso and Yan are armed with tennis rackets, which they use to fend off the bad guys' watermelon knives. Lots of fighting on top of bags of rice (or something), with lots of painful falls, as you might expect. The boys do some good jumping kicks. Fu Sing-Tak does some acrobatics and nice axe kicks against her opponents.

Fight #7 – Fight on street – Fight #6 is immediately followed by a tuk-tuk chase, which then leads to this fight. Yan and Tso trade blows with the low-level henchmen and Choi Chung-Chau as all the good guys make their way to the docks. There is some nice stunt-oriented chase action from Tso Hsiao-Hu, and this fight gives way to an extended boat chase.

Fight #8 – Jungle Combat – At the halfway mark, our heroes take to the Thai wilderness in search of the treasure. There's an extended jeep chase through a village, with the bad guys firing M-16s and M60 machine guns at our protagonists. Hollywood is generally loath to put young people in danger like that, especially in a kids film, but Chinese filmmakers do not care. Eventually, our heroes split up and take out the bad guys one by one. There are short bursts of choreography, plus Tso Hsiao-Hu using a mini-crossbow and painful stunts involving people getting knocked backward into trees.

Fight #9 – Climax – The finale is a big Sammo Hung-style free-for-all, with our five protagonists taking on Scorpion, his right-hand men, and a bunch of sword-wielding henchmen at the ruins of a Thai temple. Lots of Sammo-esque choreography against the lackeys, which is welcome. Chang Yi-Teng, who's been more of a comic foil until now, shows off some nice kicks against the bad guys, and then duels with the main bad guy's right hand man, an unnamed Caucasian with a perm and a goatee wearing white-on-white clothing. This guy does some kung fu, but does so comically. Tso Hsiao-Hu gets his butt handed to him by the one-two combo of Charles Hsu and Choi Chung-Chau, until Fu Sing-Tak helps him. Tso defeats Choi with a whip and a flying leg scissor, while Charles Hsu completely manhandles Fu (she has to get help from the boys later on). Yan takes on Yam Pak-Wang (choreographer of *The Death Games* and *Black City*) with a pair of small metal clubs, which he uses like escrima sticks. Chang Yi-Teng finally takes on George Nicolas, which has some good choreography, although Nicolas is more brawn than technique. He's finally captured by a tribe of cannibalistic natives, which is a little disappointing, but given the quantity of fighting up until then, I can live with that.

*Kung Fu Kids VI* is a literal fight fest and a great example of why the 80s were such a Golden Era for action films, but in Hong Kong and abroad. The choreography reaches the heights of the best Sammo Hung movies, and the stuntwork is as painful as anything Jackie has done, even if done on a smaller scale. People break their falls with whatever furniture is on hand, get thrown into posts, jump through real glass windows, participate in all sorts of vehicular mayhem, and just put themselves through the ringer. This is easily the best film of the *Kung Fu Kids* series and the best example of young people doing martial arts on film.

The film isn't perfect. While there's an action sequence about once every five minutes during the first half, the movie loses some steam during the second half when they go looking for the treasure, especially during the cannibal tribe sequence and shortly thereafter. There's some subplot about an orphanage that doesn't really amount to anything, either. But like I said, the quality and quantity of action more than makes up for it.

*Kung Fu Kids VI* can be seen in English (with Greek subtitles) on Youtube via the Wu Tang Collection. I had the chance to buy this on Brazilian VHS, but missed it, and now I regret it. It's one of the Holy Grail films of Chinese action cinema and an unsung hero of martial arts filmmaking. All I can say is WATCH IT! FIND IT! BUY IT! (by Blake Matthews)

**Ladies in Operations (Taiwan, 1993: Chao Chen-Kuo)** - Essentially the Taiwan version of *The Inspector Wears Skirts*, only more shameless. A group of women are plucked from their abusive, negative surroundings to participate in anti-terrorist training (well, the targets are local gangsters really). Training in skimpy, sometimes see-through outfits ensue. Largely executed with a loose skit-framework as the girls quarrel, complain, learn team spirit and then murder bad guys by the end, it's a production clearly aimed at male audiences (the supposed rousing montage-song is about how courageous these big-breasted women are. That's all in the lyrics) considering how these women are filmed and portrayed. Not to mention they are being taught seduction, there's copious shots of their behinds and the assistant, male instructor is a goofy pervert. Audience-pleasing one might say but it's desperate. Chao Chen-Kuo (*A Girl Rogue*, the source movie in Godfrey Ho's *Ninja Operation: Knight And Warrior*) insists on so much low humour and stupidity that it's almost winning. There's a dopey energy here that you laugh at and almost with. The action-ending gets the violent- and car stunts- aspect fairly right but very few of the women look comfortable shooting guns here. (by So Good Reviews)

**Lady Killer (Taiwan, 1992: Chang Jen-Chieh)** - The plotting of this Taiwanese crime drama strains credulity. After a young girl, "Show-show" witnesses the police shooting her parents (featuring a cameo by Lin Wei as her father), she is secretly adopted by the officer responsible. Completely unaware that he has raised her, she grows up hating the police and eventually becomes involved in a plot to hijack a cargo shipment. When most of her partners are killed by a gang headed by "De Phong" – played by Dick Wei in a supporting role – she is unexpectedly confronted with the reality that both her adoptive father "Charles" and sister "Wang Cheng-may" (Nadeki) are police officers.

Nadeki's character Miss Wang lives with "Shuang-shuang" (To Kwai-fa) and has several brief but energetically athletic martial arts sequences. She also fights Dick Wei in the finale. Once again, Nadeki appears in a leather jacket, and also verbally spars with To Kwai-fa over physical appearance and relationships.

In partial compensation for the plot, the film's martial arts are better choreographed than in many low budget Taiwanese productions, and the principal players are easy on the eye. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Lady Supercop (Hong Kong, 1993: Billy Chung)** - While certainly not the worst of Lam's choreography jobs (although he makes a lot of bad decisions here), the 1993 girls n' guns stinker Lady Super Cop is widely regarded as being among the worst of its ilk, which is saying A LOT. Carina Lau plays a career-oriented policewoman whose new team includes her cousin, played by Teresa Mo. Mo's character is a veteran cop who's more worried about selling gadgets to members of the force than catching crooks. That all changes when the boyfriend of one of Mo's informants is brutally murdered by a psychopath involved with some bank robbers. The main problem here is that Lau's character is pretty incompetent and unthreatening. I mean, the woman is incapable of chasing down a guy who's just gotten broadsided by a van (a recurring theme in Lam Moon-Wah's works)! To be honest, the police in the film are largely useless and spend more time getting fired on and beaten up than anything else. Early on there's a martial arts sequence between Teresa Mo and Lam regular Michael Chan, who plays Mo's mechanic neighbor. Both are dressed in kung fu student clothes and are wielding weapons. But instead of fighting, the camera just switches between the two in different poses like an anime fight. It's really stupid. The big set pieces occur in the last act, beginning with a violent gun battle at the girls' apartment. Watch for a game of Wack-a-Mole played with a pistol and some brief fight action from Michael Chan, who steals the scene. The finale is a big fight between Teresa Mo, Carina Lau and the main villain in which the women let themselves get whooped. I mean, what kind of girls n' guns film allows the female characters to get beaten down like that? The idea of the women dishing out the hardcore martial punishment is why HK cinephiles love the sub-genre to begin with! Bad move, guys. (by Blake Matthews)

**Last Blood (Hong Kong, 1991: Wong Jing)** - aka *Hard Boiled 2* - Now this is how you do an action movie! The Japanese Red Army--the same people who were the villains in *In the Line of Duty III*--are trying to assassinate the Dalai Lama during a trip to Singapore. A pair of Singaporean cops (Alan Tam and Leung Kar-Yan) are tasked with protected the Lama and stopping the terrorists. During an assassination attempt at the airport, the Lama and the girl friend of a HK tourist (Andy Lau) are shot and critically wounded. Both victims have a rare blood type, and there are only five people registered in Singapore with that type. So begins a breakneck chase across the streets of Singapore to find the donors before the bad guys can off them.

This is a Wong Jing film, so some moments of levity are expected. Most of those come from Andy Lau's desperation and Eric Tsang being...well...Eric Tsang. However, he reigns in the goofy sight gags and rape jokes, keeping the film's tone generally consistent for most of the running time. Even Natalis Chan, a guarantee for overacted goofiness, keeps his mugging on a leash for the film's duration.

The action is hard-hitting and exciting. Blackie Ko gives us everything we'd expect from a Hong Kong action film. The film is a bullet ballet first and foremost, and there are some good gunfights, especially in the first act. There are lots of people firing guns (and hitting their mark) during jumps and flips and falls. Despite being erroneously dubbed a sequel to *Hard Boiled*, which came out a year later, both films have a climax set at a hospital, featuring a villain who uses an M-16 with a grenade launcher for close-quarters combat. But Blackie Ko doesn't stop there. We have lots of bone-crushing stuntwork, with lots of people jumping through real plate glass and falling through whatever furniture is available. And true to his reputation, Ko gives us a lot of vehicular mayhem, especially in a sequence where dozens of terrorists on motorcycles try to kill our heroes, leading lots of explosions and motorcycle crashes. There's also a smattering of fisticuffs at the end, too.

And this film is brutal. I mean, part of the climax involves one of the villains going on an axe-murdering spree! Innocent bystanders are gunned down, as are supporting characters who'd otherwise be protected by plot armor. One of the villains expires after getting a revolver emptied into his crotch! In the best tradition of HK action films, nobody is safe in this movie. Highly recommended! (by Blake Matthews)

**Legacy of Rage (Hong Kong, 1993: Ronnie Yu)** – If you've never seen a Hong Kong actioner before, this is not the one to start off with. As for those who are familiar with such movies, they'll be more accustomed to the directorial style and the plotting. But even they will admit that this isn't a typical or outstanding example of Hong Kong filmmaking. While *Legacy of Rage* is in no way a terrible movie, it's overall a forgettable movie. In fact, it might not have even appeared on these shores had it not been for the presence of Brandon Lee.

Tai Seng Video, a fledgling video company devoted to Asian movies, recently released this movie to North America. They were thoughtful enough to present this in a letterboxed print (with many Asian movies, you *have* to see them letterboxed in order to fully get the impact of the action onscreen.) Unfortunately, the print they used for the video transfer is filled with scratches, which both distracts the audience and gives the air of the movie being cheap. (Hong Kong movies may be inexpensive to make, but they usually look like they were made many times more than their actual cost.) Also, the movie is dubbed; now, I am not exactly a purist when it comes to foreign movies, so I don't mind dubbing - as long as the dubbing is reasonably done. With this print of *Legacy of Rage*, Tai Seng unfortunately used a print that seems to have been made for English-speaking countries in Asia. I've seen other dub jobs for Asian movies in Asia, and they have all been pretty bad dub jobs, including this one. No characters are given voices which seem appropriate to their ages or characters, and lip-synching is non-existent.

Of course, with Brandon Lee being dubbed, it's pretty much impossible to give a critique on his performance. All I can comment about Lee himself is that he both moves and looks good throughout the movie. Part of that comes from having to do all of his own stuntwork - a requirement if you are to be taken seriously by Hong Kong audiences. Lee fans expecting to see him do a lot of martial arts will be disappointed; he doesn't have a lot of action sequences, and much of them involve guns instead of martial arts. It's well known that Lee didn't want to be compared to his famous father, so this may be an explanation for the lack of chop-socky action. In fact, this was Lee's only Hong Kong movie.

Lee plays a young man in Hong Kong with the typical Chinese name of "Brandon". Life for him in Hong Kong is good, despite having to work several jobs and having to fight off the occasional thug at a nightclub (one thug is played by Bolo Yeung in a cameo.) Brandon is in love with his girlfriend, who adores him in return, and they plan to marry soon. This has caught the eye of his best friend Michael, who secretly covets Brandon's girlfriend. It so happens at the same time that Michael and the rest of his gangster family are deciding to kill off a greedy member of their mob. Michael then executes a plan that frames and imprisons Brandon in jail for several years. When Brandon gets out...

...no, it doesn't quite go as you are thinking. As well, the pacing and detailing of the above synopsis isn't quite as you think, either. So the movie doesn't quite stick to a formula, but I don't know whether to cheer or be let down by this. For example, take the scene where there's a flashback to where Brandon and his girlfriend met for the first time. It's a nice scene, but this flashback does nothing for the plot nor bringing any further insight to the characters. Also, there is an unusual amount of time showing Brandon in prison, part of it devoted to an escape attempt that goes nowhere and has no direct or indirect consequences to what's ahead. Some other attempts to show how the characters change over time are better handled, but these attempts usually go on for too long. These segments and other detours as a result bog down the pacing. It's interesting that although the movie's length is about average, the slower pacing makes the movie *feel* longer. Although we are never extremely bored, and the movie is never bad enough to be annoying, we keep telling the movie to get on with it, for we want to see Brandon kick butt.

Eventually, Brandon does kick butt in the last 20 minutes of the movie. And I will say this for the movie - until the disappointing final man-to-man fight, this part of the movie is *great*. From a fight in a chicken barn, high speed chases with BMWs, and a whopping amount of ammo fired, the action is non-stop and doesn't disappoint. This scene does, unfortunately, have a consequence - it doesn't seem to fit with the previous 70 or so minutes, including the action that we saw before. You could almost swear the climax is from another movie.

I've only seen three other Ronny Yu movies, *The Bride With White Hair* (great), *The Bride With White Hair 2* (dull), and *Warriors of Virtue* (an interesting failure). From seeing four of his movies, he seems to be a director who puts the visual look and style of a movie at first priority, and then the success or failure of the rest of the movie depends on how strong his script is. Because of the lackluster script, it seems that Yu had no idea on how to salvage the movie. The movie looks pretty, especially the night scenes, filled with neon colors and lights. The sound, however, is horrible; though Yu couldn't probably do a thing about the lousy dubbing, he could have done something about the cheesy electronic score or the fact that this score suddenly stops several times for no reason at all during the course of the film. Viewers studying the films of Yu might find some interest in the movie, as well as any die-hard fans of Brandon Lee. For others, though, *Legacy of Rage* will probably be a disappointment, especially the more unreceptive they are to Hong Kong cinema. (by Keith Bailey of The Unknown Movies)

**Legend of a Professional (Hong Kong, 2000: Billy Chan)** - There are just enough off kilter moments to keep this film somewhat interesting for a while, but only barely. It is yet one more story covering that favorite Hong Kong mystical character – the professional killer. There is a certain coolness about these enigmatic assassins – an aloofness, a sense of fatalism and most importantly - usually good fashion sense that defines and romanticizes them.

There is nothing particularly romantic about Anthony Wong's professional killer in this film though. He is more of a working man's killer – a regular Joe - nothing flashy – no slow-mo killings – no leaping in mid air and firing - he gets a contract from his deep in the bottle agent, Law Koon-lan, and does it. Punches the clock, kills someone, punches out. To him it's just a job; no different than driving a cab – but with better hours. He lives in a small apartment and worries about his mother. His mother, Helen Law Lan, lives in Vietnam, but keeps tabs on her son and worries whether he will ever get married. Immediately after one of his contracts has been fulfilled – Wong answers his cell phone and it is his mother telling him she is coming to Hong Kong to visit and wants to meet his girlfriend.

Of course, Wong's girlfriend is a fiction to make her happy and now he has to come up with a real one. He holds auditions. He advertises in the paper for an actress and after rejecting a number of raggedy looking women, Josie Ho stumbles into his studio in her short spiky hair on the run from debt collectors - the not very nice kind – and Wong wants her out like yesterday's newspaper. But mom calls and tells him she has come early – so Anthony reluctantly takes on Josie as his pretend girlfriend.

Surprisingly love doesn't really bloom – though a grudging respect does – and when Josie learns about his means of support she wants in. He gives her a little surprise quiz – and when she survives he takes her on as an apprentice. Not too surprisingly, Josie realizes she has found the one thing that she is very good at. Soon the two of them are very busy.

The one thing that made me pick up this DVD as opposed to the myriad of other low budget Anthony Wong films that have been spewing out like sewage from a broken water pipe was a picture of Josie aiming a sniper rifle on the back cover and dressed in a school uniform on the front! Her quiet intense killer in *Purple Storm* was easily the best thing about that film and I have looked forward to more action roles for her. The action in this film is less than well done – but I have to say that Anthony and Josie make for a cute killing couple. It all plays out a bit slowly and without a lot of style – and it hits a number of cliches near the end with a dull thud – but at least both Anthony and Josie are center stage for the entire film and give solid performances. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Legend of the Dragon (Hong Kong, 1991: Danny Lee)** - I'll just discuss 'Legend of the Dragon' here, since 'All's Well Ends Well' definitely doesn't have any kung-fu (although it's the superior movie of the two, cramming in a ridiculous amount of laugh out loud moments). Chow stars as the son of a kung-fu master, played by Yuen Wah, in a small HK village in the New Territories. Pre-dating 'Kung Fu Hustle' by 13 years, Chow already shows his love of the kung-fu genre here, by filling up the village with kung-fu movie luminaries. In addition to Wah, Lee Hoi-Sang plays a blind temple keeper, Corey Yeun plays a policeman, and most significantly, Leung Kar Yan shows up as Wah's wayward brother, who's become a debt collector for the mob in HK city.

'Legend of the Dragon' is essentially a precursor to 'Shaolin Soccer', only instead of it being soccer, it's snooker. As ridiculous as it sounds on paper, director Danny Lee (yes that Danny Lee) makes the concept translate well onscreen, even if kung-fu isn't incorporated into the games as blatantly as 'Shaolin Soccer'. If you're a fan of snooker, you'll no doubt get a kick out of the fact that Chow's main adversary comes in the form of British snooker legend Jimmy White (playing himself). While there's no standout fights as such, the theme of martial arts is present throughout, with one particularly hilarious scene having Wah rip his shirt off while being questioned in a police station, and delivering an entertaining spiel of how he was Bruce Lee's double.

While 'Legend of the Dragon' was made at a time when Chow was still getting a feel for his niche, his flair for both comedy and referencing kung-fu is very much present and accounted for here, so if you're a fan of either (or snooker!), then 'Legend of the Dragon' is well worth a watch. (by Paul Bramhall)

**Legend of the Wolf (Hong Kong, 1997: Donnie Yen)** - Fung Man-Hin (DY), a soldier suffering from amnesia, returns to his home village, drawn to the 7 Saints Temple, but not knowing why. He finds Wai-Yee (CL), his childhood love, but then his past catches up to him in the form of a bandit gang, the 7 Wolves, who have a score to settle with him.

Fight #1 --- Man-Hin vs bandit gang - This is the opening fight following the credits. It takes place in a dark building. It's a lot of noise, and you can't tell what's going on. It's DY with a machete taking on a bunch of dudes. There's lots of clanging, and it's fast moving, but there's not a lot of MA on display here. Meh.

Fight #2 --- Man-Hin w/machete vs bandits - This is insane! The bulk of the fight is under-cranked to the point of exaggeration. The speed almost obliterates what DY is doing, especially with the machete. The kicks come across okay, especially those shown in slo-mo, which are nice highlights to the fight, particularly: a jumping split kick, a jumping front kick, and a side kick.

Fight #3 --- Man-Hin vs bandits & the gang lieutenant w/chain - Good fight. Still hyper-cranked unfortunately. Yen gets off some good kicks, but the fight really gets good when he uses parts of a broken bench as a pair of tonfas against the lieutenant, who uses a chain wrapped up his forearm. It's still too fast, but there're some nice combos here.

Fight #4 --- Village Raid - It's a melee! Sort of "basher" in style, but it's good. It gets even better when DY wades in, mowing down men with his fists and feet. There's a nice jumping double back kick. The bandit leader (LK-B) also unloads a few kicks of his own, which show his formidability. This evolves into a chase through the forest with DY running like the 6 Million Dollar Man and clubbing foes. He even takes out an eye patch-wearing gunman in a quite bizarre reversal of a thrown knife. It's crazy.

Fight #5 --- Man-Hin vs henchman (MW-J) - Good fight! Insanely cranked! DY fights an opponent who uses spiked palm pads combined with a mix of Tiger & Monkey style. It's a barrage of blows with Benny Hill sound f/x (like when he slaps the top of the old man's head). Then DY unleashes his inner Bruce Lee. The punches are fast and devastating, and the kicks are killer!

Fight #6 --- Man-Hin vs Bandit Leader (LK-B) - More crazy under-cranking. The fight is brutal, but very repetitive. These guys just hammer at each other. DY goes full Bruce Lee, complete with fighting yells. The end is a bit anti-climactic, too, which is disappointing. It's a hard-hitting end fight, though it's just not very satisfactory. It's just full of hate and rage, and unfortunately while its end is probably meant to be a gruesome delivery of justice, it's a bit lame.

I like this film on a number of levels. I think the plot is interesting, even the love story line, though it gets a bit trite at moments. (DY keeps having to remind CL that he has amnesia.) There is a rather torrid love scene. It's not graphic in anyway, but I find it a bit unusual for a MA flick. Some of the characters are stereotypical, too. Still, I find it works quite well.

The action is really good, but the speed of it can be a little off-putting at times. I don't know if that's intentional, or if it was committed to film, and when they saw it they just said, "Go with it." All of Donnie's trademark kicks are on display, and the guys has great hands when punching. Honestly, I can't understand why he would feel the need to under-crank anything, though I know it was standard operating procedure at the time.

Really my only complaint would be the lackluster end fight. It's good, but gets redundant with DY and LK-B beating each other over and over with the same punch or elbow or kick before switching to another technique. This needed some MA spice very badly.

I saw this years ago when I score it and Yen's Shanghai Affairs at the same time, and I remember the latter one being the better of the 2. While not the best movie in his early days, it's certainly not his worst. And it's definitely one for Donnie Yen fans and completionists. So it's your call. (by Scott Blasingame)

**Legend of Wisely (Hong Kong, 1987: Teddy Robin Kwan) – aka *Legend of the Golden Pearl*** - During the 1980's HK films seemed to have a fascination for the Indiana Jones type of adventure film and tried to emulate it in a number of films such as Jackie Chan's Condor films to Michelle Yeoh in Magnificent Warriors and this film as well. There were sometimes other sources that these films were based on, but the Indiana Jones influence is very obvious.

One would think that this kind of action/adventure film would be perfect for HK. The action genre was the bread and butter of HK films – but oddly enough none of these efforts ever really match up to the Indiana Jones films. Part of this may be simply that HK films didn't have the necessary budget (though all these films mentioned had much higher budgets than the normal HK film) to actualize these big screen epic feeling stories. But I actually think that

the reason these big adventure films never quite come off is that they lose the personalization that make HK films so special. The wonderful skills and charisma of these action actors – Jackie, Michelle and Sam Hui – seem to be dissipated on the vast canvass – their sense of humanity gets swallowed up by the budgets and grand scale of the film. So though these films are fun to watch - they never really feel like essential films to watch.

The character of Wisely has shown up in a few HK films – this one, *Seventh Curse*, *Bury Me High* and *The Cat*. According to some information provided by Sebastian Tse on the *Mobius Board*, Wisely is a character created by writer Ngai Hong in a series of books (over 100) that began back in the 1970's but didn't become popular until the 80's. They are sort of sci-fi/fantasy novels detailing the adventures of Wisely and the film adaptations tend to be very loose interpretations of the character. In this film, he is easily put into an Indiana Jones mode – but there are some sci-fi aspects to this film that seem more Wisely than Indiana Jones.

The wonderful Sam Hui never looks quite comfortable as Wisely and rarely gets to utilize his charm and sly humor – but in the many action scenes he is quite good. His friend – Teddy Robins - manipulates Wisely into helping him steal the Dragon Pearl from a secluded Buddhist temple but when Hui realizes what he has done he tries to get it back for them. The Pearl is extremely sacred to the temple and it has some strange magical powers about it. But Robins has stolen the Dragon Pearl for Ti Lung – a wealthy magnate in HK.

Hui receives the aid of Ti Lung's kung-fu fighting sister, Joey Wong, and is able to get the Pearl back – but it is soon stolen from him by Howard Hope. Howard is one of the wealthiest and most reclusive men in the world - clearly a reference to Howard Hughes – and he needs the Pearl for very mysterious reasons. Hui, Joey and Ti Lung all decide to team up and get the Pearl back for the temple. Even stranger things await them.

The film is pure adventure – rarely is a moment taken for anything else outside of a bit of flirtation between Sam and Joey. There are a number of excellent chases, solid fights and terrific locales. The story stretches from HK to Egypt to Katmandu and clearly the budget was not lacking. Some of the sets are dazzling – and the ending special effects are very cool. It's a difficult film though to take to heart - as at times it seems to be trying almost too hard to get too much on the screen.

I watched this on VCD which was a shame because I think there is a DVD version out there (saw the trailer on some other DVD). This is definitely a film that should be seen on a clean lovely transfer, but the VCD has a large amount of pixilation and fracturing and the subs were quite small.

Though this Cinema City film is far less known than others of its kind, it is a fair amount of easy going fun with some good action scenes and very nice visuals. (Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Leopard Hunting (Hong Kong, 1998: Lin Chan-Wai, Ishii Hisatosi)** - Oh, the potential of this film! A great blueprint, but then a substandard building constructed over it. With a cast of Jade Leung, Yukari Oshima, Yuen Wah, Yu Rong-Guang and Roy Cheung I had great hopes of a top notch old fashioned HK action ride. And the plot has potential as well as it stretches from HK to Manila to Tokyo to the Mainland. It is a fairly well budgeted film with good production values and a large cast.

Unfortunately, the director just has no focus (or ability) whatsoever and sadly squanders an opportunity to make a great *Girls with Guns* flick. The good guys have Jade, Yukari and a bunch of other female cops, while the bad guys consist of Yuen Wah, YRG and Roy Cheung and an army of baddies.

A great match up in the making, but very little follow through. The film really drags at times due to a script and direction that doesn't know what to do next. For example, at one point the cops convene to go over the case and regurgitate for 10 minutes what the viewer has already witnessed.

About 40 minutes into the film Yukari finally makes her appearance and gives the film a much needed shot in the arm. Jade looks fabulous as ever, but does not have as much screen time as I would like. The final 10 minutes though make the film almost worth sitting through just to see Yuen Wah take on Jade & Yukari and four other female cops in a terrific matchup. Yukari has two other decent outings against YRG and Roy Cheung - this is basically her film once she arrives on stage. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Lethal Panther (Hong Kong, 1991: Godfrey Ho)** - *aka Deadly China Dolls* - Not a redeeming thing about this low budget exploitation trash movie, but damn I enjoyed it. Lots of ridiculous over the top violence, a good helping of nudity and two sexy killer dames at the top of their game. What more could you ask for!

Now this is not to dismiss the fact that this movie has dreadful dialogue, terrible acting, pitiful dubbing and huge holes in the story & in the logic, but if that doesn't bother you this can be a lot of fun. Directed by the low budget schlockmeister Godfrey Ho, it has been issued by Tai Seng as part of The Lethal Series trilogy.

As the story begins we wander into the lives of two professional female killers - Miyamoto Yoko & Maria Jo (neither of whom I have ever seen in anything else) as they go about their business. Their lives eventually intersect as they are both assigned the same target, later they are assigned to kill each other. Lots & lots of betrayals & body counts here. Godfrey definitely had a large cache of blanks for this one. Sibelle Hu appears from time to time (in the worst dubbed voice you can imagine) as a CIA agent. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Lethal Panther 2 (Hong Kong, 1993: Cindy Chow) - aka Blood and Guts** - Yukari leads an Interpol/NBI investigation of a weapons smuggling organization with ties to Japan, but operating in the Philippines. "Albert" is a macho Manila detective whose wife was killed by the gang. Philip Ko briefly appears as a gang member who is killed by the NBI team during an attempted kidnapping. After his partner and a bystander are killed, Albert takes a surviving witness to his mother's country home. The location is betrayed and the homestead attacked.

Albert and Yukari then confront the gang at their hideout. While some of the fight scenes are spoiled by wire work, other sequences are better than average for Philippino action movies. The final fight is quite well done, but would have been even better had they left out the wires. The Cantonese version of this movie appears to have the most natural dialog and script, with a soundtrack apparently inspired by "Terminator." (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**License to Steal (Hong Kong, 1990: Billy Chan)** - Thieves fight thieves! Godenzi gets out of prison and tries to retrieve her family's treasure from the traitorous thief.

This is really one of the best modern HK action flicks ever created, action directed by Billy Chan Wui Ngai, easily Yuen Bui's and Ngai Sing's best modern fighting, obviously Joyce Godenzi's best fighting, Agnes's best, and I've never seen Billy Chow move so well for so long. Chui Jing Yat kicks even better than Chow. There are numerous fights in this movie, all of them are great except the first one which is just a kendo sparring match between Aurelio and Godenzi. But every fight other than this one is great.

Biu's fight against the no-name tour guide proves this. It's one of the coolest fights I've ever seen with Biu, he takes on a girl for only about 20 seconds and she uses some kind of long fist on him, which is great and Biu naturally moves very well. Many of you will remember seeing this on the Cinema of Vengeance or I think on Top Fighter as well. It's short but makes a very cool first fight (I don't consider the previous one even a fight).

Ngai Sing chases after a car and has some nice stuntwork, including one cut where he grabs the back of a car and slides onto the pavement, looks very painful. He steals Yuen Biu's bicycle, he makes a HUGE deal about it, and gets in a fight with Ngai, which is one of those fights that is so good you don't care about length, much like every fight in this movie (only they get long). Ngai does great fast kicks, followed by handwork that I idolize and try to copy but can never seem to get it right, and Biu does a backflip off a wall and it's over, so fast but it's great. I see some smacks of Biu's choreography there too. Cool scene altogether.

Godenzi and Aurelio get into a battle concerning the stolen CD, and Godenzi gets the spotlight (she's Sammo's wife, why wouldn't she?) and frankly, she's twice as good as Aurelio. Her hands look well trained and her kicks are very high with snap. Aurelio is fine too but doesn't have the finesse, she moves like a body builder (which is what she is in real life). Biu intervenes, fights with Aurelio with some good hands, and then Chui and Chow double up on him which is super cool. Biu does just fine too, and Chui throws a super high whirlwind (he's a flashier kicker than Chow because he's far shorter) and Biu finishes everything off by getting angry. Honestly I've not seen Biu fight like this ever before in a modern flick, if you think Biu's ever slow in his other movies, I guarantee you'll be surprised at him here (I know some of you are out there). And this scene is fairly lengthy too, maybe about 1:30.

Godenzi goes to Aurelio's house to grab the CD, but Chui and Chow are on guard. Some bursts of kickboxing here. Chow does some nice moves onto a table for a couple cuts, Chui flies across the room at whoever Godenzi's partner is, and Joyce escapes with her. Good scene.

The acclaimed fight in the parking garage (or construction site, whatever it is it looks like a parking garage), or not so acclaimed because there are about 5 English-speaking people who have written about this movie on the net, is fabulous and is the pinnacle of HK movie fighting. Chow fights Godenzi and Biu, while Chui fights Ngai Sing. Every



moment of this fight is amazing, no slow spots, no bad camerawork, sloppy editing, nothing, and seriously everyone who watches this scene thinks the movie is over when it's done. IT'S NOT! There is more after this, but this scene is something like 7 minutes long of just fighting, and probably around 5 minutes if all the warming up and squaring off and non-action there is cut out (which would hurt). Joyce starts off with Chow, Chow does some of the best fighting... no, THE best fighting I've ever seen from him, fast punch/kick combinations mixing the two like they're one, and Joyce returning well too. Ngai then fights Chui Jing Yat, this would be the kicking section of the fight, the two do kicks and punches so well, especially Chui who has hands for feet. Fast choreography too, non stop really. Chow goes on with Godenzi with more fast hands, and Biu intervenes once again and does the rest of the fight against Chow. So cool, and it takes forever to beat him down. We finally see Ngai and Chui finishing things off; Chui throws 3 awesome arial kicks, one is one I've never seen before and another is another super high whirlwind. Of course Ngai is great too, his hands are noticeably fast. Again this scene must be 7 minutes long, and I thought the movie was over but realized that there was another 15 minutes left for a finale.

The final scene pits Aurelio against Godenzi. Some of you might realize that I have been leaning toward Godenzi, and while she's certainly a better fighter, Aurelio does some impressive acrobatics (if that's her, I mean she was doubled madly in *She Shoots Straight's* end fight). But whoever does her part does it well. They start with good punches and kicks, Joyce sometimes doing an arm lock or something, and they do some kicks over vases and artifacts, one of the kicks Joyce does is great, actually all of her kicking is excellent. Fast handwork too. One of the best little stunts I've ever seen here is when Joyce (doubled I'm sure) does a back handspring UP onto a box which is about 4 and a half feet tall. Awesome, looked like Biu doing it. Joyce goes down stairs, fights off two gwaigos who are good but fight for about 3 seconds each, one of them gets side kicked in the throat I can see. Godenzi and Aurelio square off in a safe area one on one with better lighting, and this is the pinnacle of the fight, lots of very fast kicking, hands, and some cool throws, Joyce is on top of the game though. She has some very professional parts where she stands her ground unlike I've ever seen from a female fighter, I prefer watching her over Michelle Yeoh. Aurelio throws some fine moves but lacks the action acting of Joyce, something she probably got from her husband, Sammo. Good scene, nicely finished.

I really can't complain much, except had they switched the parking lot scene with the last one, it would have made a better finale as the parking lot fight is seriously one of the best fights in HK history. However, judging from content and quality alone, I can't possibly give this anything less than a 5/5. If I had a rating system that allowed for an occasional 6/5, this would probably get one because it's the best kickboxing I've seen out of the 80's, and that entails that nothing in the 90's even held a stick to it. An absolute must own for everyone, and all people will enjoy it. And I have to mention Yuen Biu's character. He's charming, his dialogue is overly noble and everything is formal to him, he pops up wherever there's trouble and is a self employed officer (people call him a swordsman). Even Biu alone could make this movie a 5/5. And the camerawork is perfect for every cut, never is the action obscured at all, even the sloppy VHS EP copy in the dark was easy to understand. Anyways, GET THIS, if you can ever find it that is. I bet Taiseng has it. (by Eric Jacobus of the Stunt People)

**Little Heroes Lost in China - (Taiwan, 1995: Allen Lan) - aka *Little Kids Lost in China*** - Of all the Moon Lee movies I have seen, this one has the most unusual cast. While usually paired with Yukari Oshima, Cynthia Khan or Sibelle Hu, her co-stars in this film are six children. I had no idea what to expect when I first watched *Little Heroes*. But my doubts were soon put to rest when the movie opened with a spectacular fight scene that Moon fans will surely treasure.

This 1995 action/adventure film mainly takes place in the forests of China. An American family is invited to China by the Biological Research Center but the film never explains why. As soon as they arrive at the airport their luck takes a turn for the worst. This is also where we are introduced to the main antagonists -- two brutish Americans who plan on stealing the Antique Drum from the Scared Land of the Isolated Valley.

On their way to obtain a forest permit, the family gets separated from their son, Jack, when he falls down the side of a mountain while exploring an old abandoned hut. Five children discover a bruised and weary Jack shortly thereafter. At first the children mistake him for a monkey, but then make him a member of their group. Some of the funniest moments are when the children fight with the other village's loggers. The action is very cartoonish but the kids' display of kung fu is very impressive.

When the two American bad guys take the *Little Heroes* hostage, Moon lee comes to their aid. But it will take the help of her sister and another female from the opposing village to take down these mammoth thugs. As with the opening fight scene, this final fight is incredible with everyone taking punishment. Moon fans won't be let down.

My only complaint is that I thought Moon should have had more screen-time. A lot of the film is spent on the children and while those scenes are entertaining, I would have rather been watching Moon. So far this has been her most recent film, but I sure hope it isn't her last. Hong Kong Cinema needs this *Femme Fatale*. It just isn't the same

without her. Maybe she could make Angel 4 and have Yukari Oshima return as the twin sister of Madam Yeung. Just think of what it could do for their careers, not to mention how much the fans would love to see that reunion. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Live Hard (Hong Kong, 1989: Yuen Cheung-Yan)** - Despite the title, this ultra rarity is not a tongue in cheek spoof of 'Die Hard'. Rather, it is a fairly solid entry from the waning years of Hong Kong's modern day action cycle.

Hong Kong cop, Hui (Simon Yam) is investigating a band of terrorists who killed the son of a high ranking official, but finds his progress constantly impeded by his superior. Meanwhile, a top undercover unit is maneuvering to quickly find out exactly who the next target is before it's too late. Hui manages to capture the perceived ringleader named Ironman (Eddie Ko), but he is promptly released and Hui finds himself suspended (Ironman as it turns out, was a member of the special unit working undercover). Undaunted, he carries on his investigation, befriending an American reporter (Kim Maree Penn) for info, not realizing she is in fact the head of the terrorist organization...

The story is pretty generic and the script is a purely going by the numbers affair with little character development and somewhat of a lax buildup to the action scenes. What makes 'Live Hard' such a treat is the high quality of the action itself and it's large cast of notable actors and fighters. In an early role, Simon Yam already has charisma to spare, even if his role is so underdeveloped. As the head of the undercover unit, Hwang Jang Lee (in one of his last roles) gets to show off his supreme kicks in several fight scenes, showing no signs of aging. This is a good role for the Korean superkicker, one that should make his fans mucho happy. Genre fave Elaine Liu plays a member of Hwang's squad and unfortunately does not have a whole lot to do until the finale. I for one would have liked to have seen her role expanded a bit. Making her debut, Australian Karate expert Kim Marie Penn definitely leaves an impression. Her acting was nothing to write home about, but she really lets it rip when the fists and feet start flying. Her final reel smackdown vs Hwang is a real eye opener. In fact the entire special unit vs terrorists finale is filled to the brim with some outstanding fights and stuntwork. US Karate champion Farley Ruth Kordica is memorable for her considerable skills and freakishly scary looks. The only other role she appeared in was 'The Witness' (aka In the Line of Duty 4) where she gets an intense one on one with Cynthia Khan. Ever reliable Mark Houghton has a brief early appearance in the dubbed export version only as a target of the terrorists.

While it is lacking in character buildup (it plays almost as if it's first reel is missing), 'Live Hard' with it's hard hitting action and rewindable finale makes for good fun for the 80's action enthusiast. (by Films from the Far Reaches)

**Long Arm of the Law (Hong Kong, 1984: Johnny Mak)** - This 1984 film directed by Johnny Mak is often cited as an influential forerunner of the Heroic Bloodshed films that were to become hugely popular only a few years later in the work of John Woo. Though this film certainly has elements of the Heroic Bloodshed genre – male bonding, loyalty and honor – it feels much more in the tradition of the gritty film noirs of the 1940s – in particular the work of Jules Dassin, Anthony Mann and Robert Siodmak. It has a cinematic style that is pared down to the essentials, fast paced and imbued with an unromanticized edge that has “dead end” written all over it. This film would have felt very much at home in glorious black and white.

The film becomes increasingly involving and tense as it progresses and as the characters become distinct individuals the viewer is faced with an intriguing moral issue. Mak makes these characters very human and likable – and yet at the same time they are remorseless killers. Unlike a Chow Yun Fat in The Killer who only kills people deserving of it, these guys kill anyone in their way – cops, civilians and crooks. Yet there is still a part of you that can't help but be sympathetic for their plight and root for them to escape an ending that seems inevitable.

In the Mainland Lam Wei (in a terrific tough guy performance) organizes a group of five men from his old army unit to go into HK and rob a jewelry store. Almost right from the start things begin going badly for the group as one is killed by border guards and then when they go to the jewelry store they find out that someone has attempted to rob it right before them. They look suitably suspicious though and the cops come over to question them, which leads to a car chase and shoot out through the streets of HK.

After escaping, Wei decides to hit the store again in three days, but in the meantime the group relaxes in hostess bars and then to earn some extra cash take a hit job from Shum Wai. In a great scene they shoot the target high above an ice rink and the man falls over the railing and crashes far below and then starts skidding along the ice like a puck knocking down rows of happy skaters! It turns out the man is a cop and now the entire HK police force gears up to catch the cop killers.

Finally, after a number of twists and turns the gang is trapped within the Walled City of Kowloon. This last fifteen minutes of the film is an amazing display of cinematic magic from Mak. The camera brilliantly tracks the group trying to find an escape through the maze of narrow alleyways, dead ends and old tenement buildings and the

camera kinetically follows their increasingly panicked movements as every avenue appears sealed off by the cops. The various shootouts are well staged – claustrophobic, unforgiving and bloody – and slowly the gang is pushed into a tiny corner to make their last stand.

Though this film offers no star power – the ensemble cast (apparently some of them were amateurs) is excellent and the pacing and tension of the film will completely rope you in. This is simply a terrifically well made film. As a side note it was produced by Sammo Hung and written by Philip Chan (Chow Yun Fat's superior in *Hard Boiled* and director of another great thriller – *Night Caller*). (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Long Arm of the Law: Saga II (Hong Kong, 1987: Michael Mak)** - As its English title proclaims, this gritty offering from the director-scriptwriter team of Michael Mak and Phillip Chan has links to an earlier work of theirs which Stefan Hammond and Mike Wilkins described as a "seminal film [that] foreshadowed the violent realism of later efforts by Ringo Lam, John Woo, and Kirk Wong" (In "Sex and Zen" & "A Bullet in the Head", 1996:202). Apart from these two productions both focusing on a group of Mainland Chinese men who had illegally entered Hong Kong and ended up getting heavily involved in violent criminal activities in the then British Crown Colony, the 1987 piece also does begin with the repeat screening of certain key scenes from "Long Arm of the Law I" (that two senior Royal Hong Kong Police Force officers are seen viewing on a TV). And while -- rather understandably -- none of that influential preceding effort's anti-heroes make appearances in the second entry in the series (that ended up comprising four movies altogether), one of the 1984 hit crime drama's principal cast members does turn up in a lesser as well as different role in this later Golden Harvest presentation.

Like with other official follow up efforts, *LONG ARM OF THE LAW: SAGA II* is less able than its predecessor in the series to feel like a majorly trail-blazing work. This is not to say that that which also was not as unpredictable lacks any memorable moments. Indeed, this generally grim feeling movie does possess a particular graphic (torture) scene that looks to have become so (in)famous as to rate a mention plus virtual re-staging some eleven years later in "Young and Dangerous: The Prequel". However, I couldn't help but notice that, as with one of the first "Long Arm of the Law"'s unforgettable sequences, the scene in question features the use of the presence of rats as well as humans who could be said to act more like animals than many people will be hoping that they never ever get reduced to being.

Alternatively, this (re)viewer does feel that the personnel responsible for *LONG ARM OF THE LAW: SAGA II* do deserve some praise for looking to have made a serious attempt to do much more than complacently reprise what had brought them so much success three years previously. Hence it being so that, rather than have its protagonists be Mainlanders intent on making illegal gains across the border, the pretty relentlessly downbeat work's main Mainland Chinese characters turn out to be a trio of illegal immigrants who agree early on in the film to work -- under the supervision of a "Hongkie" veteran undercover cop (nicknamed "Biggy" and well portrayed by Alex Man) - - as undercover operatives cum informers for two years in return for being allowed to permanently settle in the Fragarant Harbor. Similarly, instead of spending some time on both sides of the much traversed boundary, this post "Anglo-Chinese Agreement on Hong Kong" movie -- that appears intent on painting a portrait of its home territory that is much more hellish than paradisiacal -- is set entirely in the area to the south of that dividing line.

Early on in *LONG ARM OF THE LAW: SAGA II*, what looks like very detailed background information about the Mainland Chinese characters played by Elvis Tsui, Ben Lam and Yuen Yat Chor appears on screen. Unfortunately, on account of it being in the form of Chinese script that does not get translated into English, many of us will not be party to it; with the result being that at least one of the movie's main trio -- i.e., the short individual named Hok Kwan (and essayed by Yuen Yat Chor) who I, probably not coincidentally, consider to be the least sympathetic of that troika -- largely remains a cipher outside of what can be gleaned from observing him going about his high risk assigned activities plus by way of his interactions with a club hostess he falls for (portrayed by the versatile Pauline Wong).

Nonetheless, it is true enough that these three individuals do manage to come across as having very distinct personalities from one another (as well as the man who was assigned to be the 13 year police veteran assigned to be their supervisor but ended up being closer to a good friend than the sort of callous superior who promised to be the death of all of them). To some extent, this is due to some interesting plus salient biographical details getting revealed over the course of *LONG ARM OF THE LAW: SAGA II* regarding Elvis Tsui's Li Ho Tung character (e.g., this authoritative figure having been a police officer back on the other side of the border, and his having been taught -- by the father he loves dearly -- to be a good maker of a certain kind of dumpling that's native to his province) and Ben Lam's King San character (including the former soldier cum radio operator's getting reacquainted with a Vietnam campaign comrade in Hong Kong who he ends up getting charged to betray). Another positive contributing factor probably also is that, like David Lam Wai had done in the first *LAOTL* effort, Messrs. Tsui and Lam turned in sterling performances that made the parts they played feel much more fleshed out and affecting than

they might have been if they had been essayed by less capable actors. (by YTSL of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Love on Delivery (Hong Kong, 1994: Stephen Chow, Lee Lik-chi)** - It is a shame that not more of Stephen Chow's earlier films are available in North American releases. I tend to like most of his films and this one is certainly in the top third. I do not think I have laughed so much in a while then with the indelible Garfield (I would need much more space to describe this scene.) It also has one of the more unique, if not preposterous, martial art moves the "Invincible Wind and Fire Wheel." Chow in his earlier career was often painted as a verbal *moleitau* (nonsense) humanist, but he does have a penchant for pop references from several countries including Hong Kong and the United States (Leon Lai, *The Karate Kid*, *The Terminator*, a great cameo from Jacky Cheung Hok-Yau) and his visual humor is often underrated. I look forward to seeing this again.

On a side note: I read two book capsule reviews of this film yesterday: Paul Fornoroff (*At the Hong Kong Movies: 600 Reviews from 1988 Till the Handover*) who did not like the film (not a big surprise) and John Charles (*The Hong Kong Filmography, 1977-1997: A Complete Reference to 1,100 Films Produced by British Hong Kong Studios*) who did. (by Masterofoneinchpunch of KFF)

**Love to Kill (Hong Kong, 1991: Lin Chan-Wei)** - This quite poignant and well acted movie gets better with a second viewing. It pits two women's affection for their male partners against their better interest. One, a nightclub singer, befriends a fugitive from a gang, while the other - a Japanese played by Yukari - is befriended by an HK detective investigating the case. The men's subsequent conflict with the gang eventually draws both women in and leads to their deaths. The nightclub singer is thrown from the window of her apartment, while Yukari is stabbed with a metal rod during a fight. The final fight scene is classic Yukari - all guns, legs and flashy high kicks - as well as being quite bloody. Although shot on videotape, this movie is quite well acted and has good location photography. More drama than actioner, the fight scenes are not especially well choreographed - although Yukari is quick and athletic in her fight opportunities. Yukari's character spends much time appearing fairly dressily attired. Given her powerful form, she appears rather out of place in a dress and heels. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Lover's Tear (Hong Kong, 1992: Chen Chi Liang)** - A young Hong Kong detective Chung Ao from the anti-smuggling unit it sent to Shenzhen where he discovers information about the criminal Lin Wei. Chung follows Lin Wei's mistress Ling to him, and interrupts his attempted murder by his police inspector partner Hai who is seeking revenge for a murdered partner. A female undercover Public Security officer, Su Erh (Yukari) in turn tails Chung but is shot in a movie projection booth under ambiguous circumstances. Yukari is barely recognizable in a wig. Ling, who is a witness to these events, is deaf and mute. Chung is taken into custody on suspicion by Commissioner Kung (Sammo Hung). However, he and Ling escape from a prison van, still handcuffed. As she is the only person who can exonerate him, Chung flees with Ling. After he is injured she takes pity on him and the pair travel by bus to her duck farm in the country. Chung gradually falls in love with Ling in a gentle, well filmed story of a doomed relationship. Lin Wei returns, and Chung arranges a meeting with Commissioner Kung. Kung uses Chung as bait. Kung's trap works, and both Lin Wai and the corrupt Inspector Hai are killed. Appearing in only a cameo part, Yukari looks fabulous in Chinese police uniform. But blink, and you'll miss her. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Lucky Seven (Taiwan, 1986: Chao Chen-Kuo) – aka Seven Ninja Kids; 7 Lucky Ninja Kids** - I have no idea what movie this originally was; the title "7 Lucky Ninja Kids" is superimposed in bad digital lettering over a still screencap in the middle of the credits, which tells me that someone, somewhere, has released this under another title. [Edit: Astute reader Gerard points out that this is also known as Lucky 7. It may also have been released under the franchise title "Thunder Ninja Kids."] What I can tell you is that the few people who have seen this current incarnation and commented on in on the IMDb have done so with a uniformity of opinion, ranging from "eh" to "blech."

What are they, NUTS?! I loved this. I'm not saying that it's high art, but I giggled and guffawed and paid attention every minute, fully entertained. My kids did, too; in fact, this may turn out to be a family favorite. (Except for Alex. He's ten years old, and suddenly too cool for things that are self-consciously hokey. His loss.)

(As is par for the course for Americanized martial arts flicks, the seven kids in question are Chinese, not Japanese, but at least the "Ninja" appellation isn't quite as misplaced as it usually is, as at least one of the kids likes to dress up in ninja attire.)

We're introduced to the seven during the opening credits, as they show their moves by beating up generic adults. bear with me here, as the text got mangled by the pan-&-scan framing:

- Little Chilli (Chiao something, our token female)
- Little Fatty (Yang Wei something)
- Bumpkin (Tsu Yu Ta)
- Little Elf (Lin Tung something)
- Rocky (Cheng Wei Pai)
- Two Teeth (Wang Chi Chen)
- something Hsiao Mao (Chang Chai something)

Which really doesn't help as much as you'd think, since one of the kids is addressed as "Dummy" consistently throughout the movie. The perils of international cinema.

Okay. Anyway. Six of our seven get to the airport in their individual styles (parachuting, sparking skateboard, ninja scurry, etc.) to greet the seventh, Rocky, who's back for a visit from the United States. These kids are somewhere between eight and ten years old, so it's no surprise that Rocky's showing a little bit of extra interest in lone girl Chilli. Chilli is also the only one whose parents are even mentioned, and that just to explain their absence; they went on a trip and left her in the protection of her chauffeur (whose name I never caught, so he'll just be "chauffer" for the duration), whom Chilli delights in tormenting and eluding. No parents or guardians are ever mentioned for the others. Even Rocky is just fine flying pan-Pacific flights with no adult accompaniment and no adults to meet him on the Hong Kong side.

The kids head out for a celebratory restaurant dinner, where Rocky impresses them all with his American finesse in ordering steak. ("Medium? Don't you want a big one?") But Chilli notices that the table across from theirs is occupied by less savory sorts -- specifically, a bunch of gangsters, negotiating for the sale of a diamond with Helen Chang and her whitejacketed companion. When the gangsters try a double-cross, the whole restaurant explodes in a flurry of fu fighting, with the kids immediately defending themselves and holding their own. In fact, as far as this movie demonstrates, the only person in Hong Kong who doesn't know kung fu is the chauffeur, who snuck in against Chilli's wishes to keep an eye on her and ends up wandering into the wrong end of too many fists and feet.

Well, the kids finally give their meal up for lost and head out to the mall, where Survivor's "Burning Heart" is playing in a continuous loop (and I'm betting they didn't make any licensing fees of this, either). Meanwhile, Helen and Whitejacket escape with their diamond, and the head of this little group of gangsters (whom I shall dub The Smirker) has to report back to the Big Boss his failure. The Big Boss dresses in a white suit and hat, speaks with a nasal sneer, and wears an eyepatch. Occasionally. When he feels like it. Not because there's anything wrong with his eye. The Smirker and his posse are sent out to try again to get the diamond.

And man, the Big Boss's HQ must be close, because the Smirker had time to get there, report, and get back out before Helen and Whitejacket even got back to their car in the parking garage! They're chased, and there's yet more fu fighting and bullets flying, and the two of them split up. Whitejacket takes off through the mall where the kids are playing, and Chilli and Dummy follow the gangsters to see what's going on. Chilli manages to see Whitejacket get shot and fall down a three-story stairwell; fortunately, he's still got enough spunk in him to give her the diamond and tell her to give it to Helen Chang. Identifying characteristics? She's wearing a red rose, and she has a mole on her leg.

The gangsters chase the two kids through a housing development and back into the mall (yup, "Burning Heart" is still playing), and the two of them prove they're more than a match for a half-dozen hardened criminals. These chases and fights are a large portion of the movie, and it's sad that they're impossible to describe for you, but let me tell you that this scene contains what is quite possibly the best kick-in-the-groin gag ever.

When Chilli and Dummy make it back to the rest of their friends, their tale is pooh-poohed and the diamond waved off as a fake, until the Big Boss's two closest henchmen show up at the apartment where they all hang out: Fatty and Dummy! Yes, I know -- we already have a Fatty and a Dummy among the Lucky Kids, but it's well known that there are only seven possible nicknames in the world, so it's no wonder that we have to double up sometimes. (I'll try to use modifiers like "Little Dummy" and "Big Fatty" when I can, but I make no promises.) Wondering about their names might have the positive effect of distracting you from wondering how they knew where to find the kids in the first place. In any event, it's not like the kids are in any danger from them; when the bumbling duo try to break down the door, they end up crashing right through the apartment, out the balcony, and down twelve stories to the parking lot. None the worse for wear.

Confronted by evidence that Chilli's story may just be true, the kids decide... to go to the iceskating rink! While

there, Chilli spends five minutes strutting her dance moves to the tune of "I'm Your Man" by Wham! (sorry, guys, wait in line behind Survivor) while Rocky makes appreciative noises. But they're soon found by the gangster posse. Hmm... lots of ice... clumsy henchmen... I think you can see where this is going, can't you?

So. Escaping once again from the bad guys, the kids decide to start searching for this Helen Chang in earnest. After all, in a city of over five million people, how hard could it be? Unfortunately, with one of the identifying characteristics being a mole on Helen's leg, we're in for a whole bunch of gags with the kids looking up skirts. And with the chauffeur, tagging along, being blamed for it and getting slapped. (Heck, the kids were doing that to him even before they started looking for Helen Chang. The best occurrence is when Chilli pats a woman's behind and immediately says, "He did it." When the woman turns to slap the chauffeur, he says, "Hold on," and gives her butt a good groping -- because, hey, as long as he's going to get slapped for it...)

The chauffeur steps more fully into the story when, trying to get the kids out of the whole matter, he dresses in drag with a flower on his dress and paints a mole the size of a softball on his thigh. (Playing in the background? "I Just Called to Say I Love You." Sorry, Stevie, wait in line...) The ruse only fails when he pats his bosoms, and the balloons in his bra pop.

And then the chase is on again, on bikes, until Rocky gets caught by the gangsters. Then the kids manage to find Helen Chang, so I suppose if they wanted to they could just consider her Rocky's replacement and... but no. The Big Boss calls and demands they exchange the diamond for Rocky's life. It's time for the big showdown, in the requisite industrial warehouse!

Now, it's common knowledge that Hong Kong action stars get the crap beaten out of them on camera, but it would probably surprise you to see how much punishment even the child actors take during the fifteen-minute finale, especially after the Big Boss unveils his secret weapons: Two Argentine tough guys. You might catch yourself winching as you watch these gradeschoolers being repeatedly flipped into walls, dropped to the floor, and being thrown headfirst through sheets of candy glass (I hope it was candy glass) to drop five feet to the concrete below.

But all's well that ends well (unless they shot the most dangerous parts last, in which there may be a very good reason why I can't find the child actor's names in any other features), the Argentines and the Big Boss get the snot beaten out of them, and everyone's happy. Rocky even declines to go back to the States at the last minute so he can spend more time with his friends. I guess when no one has any parents, your friends really mean a lot to you!

Looking back over what I've written, I suppose it's not at all clear why I enjoyed this movie as much as I did. A large part of it is the martial arts skills on display; the children are more believable fu fighters than plenty of adults I've seen in chop-socky flicks. And the kids have personality, especially Chilli, which comes through even with the standard cartoony dubbing. And when you've got a running gag about a man getting slapped repeatedly by women who think he's touched their tushes -- shucks, what's not to like? (Aside from some of the English-language script. Guys, when you're translating a film for an audience of American children, you'll probably raise some eyebrows when you include curses like "goddamn" and "Jesus Christ" and other words like "tits.")

Best of all, this movie is one of those released by Brentwood for their Dollar DVD line at better discount stores everywhere. Given that even renting a VHS tape costs upwards of two bucks these days, you could easily find much worse ways to spend your money. (by Nathan Shumate)

**Lucky Seven II (Taiwan, 1989: Chao Chen Kuo) - *Magnificent 7 Kung Fu Kids*** - Seven young boys, including the son of the Police Chief, are recruited to attend a training camp where they refine their martial arts skills. In this Taiwanese action comedy the boys are to serve as undercover agents to apprehend a child kidnapping ring. Fei (Philip Ko) and his partner Huay seek to double-cross "Flower King," the head of the kidnapping ring. Flower King (Yukari) leads a gang of leather clad gun toting females - some of whom are excellent martial artists.

Unfortunately it sounds more interesting than it actually is, and the actual film more closely resembles a parody of the genre. Yukari looks like an Elvis impersonator, complete with white costume, cape and over-sized sunglasses. She has one very brief but excellent fight scene set in a tunnel. This involves several jumps, flips and a jumping split kick at head height. After their training the boys rescue one of their number who has been kidnapped. They defeat Flower King and her gang - using slingshots.

Slow pace and goofy comedy make this significantly less rewarding than most Taiwanese action comedies. It's not worth the considerable trouble to find it. One small point of interest is that Yukari can shoot a large caliber handgun without blinking or the slightest change in her facial expression. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn

Bridge)

**Lucky Stars Go Places (Hong Kong, 1986: Eric Tsang)** - Andy Lau and his groupies (including Kent Cheng and Alan Tam) woo Sylvia Chang for what feels like 8 hours until the end fight comes. Sammo practically has a bit part along with Maka, both of whom are so funny my side was hurting, but they're the only comedy you can get from this.

I was really worried when I saw the intro for this. It was Tetsuya, a newcomer who I've never seen since, fighting someone who looks like Yuen Kwai. Tetsuya's style is really bad it seems and he's terrible here, more on him later. Short scene.

And what's up with the original lucky stars showing up for 5 minutes and disappearing like that? They were great here but, poof gone. No more, say hello to Andy and his boring group.

Andy Lau has a lackluster training scene where he's very unconvincing. The scene would be good if it were, say, SOMEONE ELSE. Andy's kicks are so bad. When he kicks he immediately retracts his leg before it even connects. The other stunt men do good stuff, but Andy is bad. He may be athletic, he can pommel out a window and throw a punch, but by no means can he really screen fight. Yea I know, anyone with a connection in the HK film business would jump at the chance to play the starring role in a movie (he is in this), but the bottom line is he's bad. Oh there's a crazy stunt by a stuntman though where whoever is doubling Andy moves a ladder across 2 buildings and a guy jumps out that window way across and lands on the ladder, check the pic below. Pretty nuts. In all this scene is bad because of Andy, but the music was hardcore 80's, that's all I can really say besides the good stuntmen.

Maka has a comedy fight against Sammo in an insane cell and whoever does this is good, but Maka's double runs along the corner of the wall and makes himself almost float there, this fight isn't anything special though. Can't expect good fighting from Maka, but of course he's funny so I'll give it that.

END FIGHT! ... Wait Andy Lau fights Tetsuya. First he fights a crowd... again I can't stand his style, there's something about him I don't like at all. Andy fights Fong Hak On, believe me it's not great. Some soso choreography and if it's Fong who does that fall at the end, that's the best part.

Tetsuya comes, and it gets better. Tetsuya's kicks are great, Lau has to be doubled to avoid some of them, and the choreography here is surprisingly brilliant, I've never seen this done before. For example, a jumping roundhouse, then jump inside with 2 arial punches aimed downward, that's creative. More good choreography, mostly coming from Tetsuya who does very unique attacks, chain kicks and fast punches of all kinds, chops, backfists, etc. Andy grabs a sword and Tetsuya has his too, some good swordwork by both of them, yadda yadda and FINALLY Sammo bursts in and we're saved. Much better now, Sammo does kicks, Tetsuya gets to go as fast as he can, some fast handwork and the kicks are more common. But this part of the fight has some standoff parts, but the technique is so much better now. Sammo finishes him off with a mean looking kick to the head that actually connects (probably using the power shoe, which is a soft shoe). Good stuff.

If ONLY Sammo had done the entire end fight himself, this would be another saver that would get a 4/5. Tetsuya deserved WAY more than Andy Lau, he was incredibly fast and could keep up with Sammo so easily, but Sammo is all about exposing new talent. Sadly sometimes he fails miserably and Andy Lau, thankfully, got out of the rest of the end fight. That saved it a point I think. For die hard Sammo fans, you'll wanna check this out, there are some great moves by Sammo at the end, and this Tetsuya guy, don't be fooled by his young looks, he's mean and fast. Really it's a great end fight, there is some other stuff thrown in there that I didn't mention, didn't feel it necessary. Had this ended with a less complex end fight (this one is long too, it rages on for maybe 5 minutes), it wouldn't get such a nice score. But I'll give it a 3/5. (by Eric Jacobus of the Stunt People)

**Lunatic Frog Women (Taiwan, 1982: Lee Tso Nam) - aka Lady Piranha; Virgin Commandos** - I've always wanted to rent this film simply because of the title and for the first ten minutes it lived up to it's promise as being a cult type film. Now it had no subtitles, so I am just guessing at what this movie was about - but it was not exactly a complex story.

A number of very young nubile women are all prisoners in a stockade in some remote area and they break out of prison by killing loads of guards in every way imaginable and fight their way to a boat. This was fun to watch - but then their boat sinks and they wash ashore on an island. They encounter what seem to be guerrillas and join them and go through a very lengthy training period to become lunatic frog women . I had sort of hoped the title indicated that somehow there were some mutated forms of frog women in this film, but that is not the case. Finally after a lengthy lull in the action, the women are ready and attack what appeared to be Vietnamese soldiers in a pretty brutal battle.

Not nearly as much exploitation value here as I had hoped for in a film that in Chinese translates to - "Scorching Sun Female Baby" ! (By Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Mad Mad Ghost (Hong Kong, 1992: Billy Chan)** - Lam Ching-Ying stars one more time as a Taoist priest who runs a ghost busting school with five students in this mildly amusing film. Business isn't great and he has to move into a house that is rumored to have ghosts inside. In fact, there is a ghost couple who has been living there for 100 years. The husband though is a thoroughly nasty fellow who is guilty of ghost/spousal abuse as he constantly beats his sweet gentle though not particularly bright wife.

LC-Y being the gentleman he is boots the husband out of the house and he and his students all become good friends with the ghost wife. She is useful as well for ghost busting training exercises! The husband comes back with a few ghost buddies to take revenge. At the same time two gweilos are looking for hidden gold in the house and are willing to kill for it. They hire an evil sorcerer to kill the ghost. It turns out that having a friendly ghost around can be very useful as she does a little drunken kung-fu on them.

There are some enjoyable LC-Y sequences in the film and a nice fight with the gweilos (one who is the same gweilo that was in *Yes Madam*), but the best part of the film is watching the female ghost (Jacqueline Law) transform from a passive victim to a disco dancing kung fu queen.

For some strange reason the gweilos are unfortunately portrayed as racists and they spew a number of anti-Chinese comments. For the most part this is a fairly insubstantial film – but it has a few hidden charms and Lam Ching-Ying is always worth watching in just about anything. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Madam City Hunter (Hong Kong, 1993: Johnny Kong)** - A somewhat tepid but reasonably enjoyable "femme fatale" vehicle that has Cynthia Khan trying to eliminate the threat of the Five Finger Gang (with names like Thumb and Middle), mean and nasty bad guys who are somehow connected to the younger, black widowish woman (Kara Hui Ying-Hung) being courted by her lonely father. She is helped along by a fellow cop who has the hots for her (Tommy Wong Kwong-Leung), an unkempt private investigator (Anthony Wong Chau-Sang), and his childish, hyperactive Philipino wife/girlfriend (I'm guessing wife; it's not really made clear) Blackie (Sheila Chan Suk Laan).

You can split the film's content into three major categories: the action, the comedy, and the filler. The action is, unsurprisingly, the strongest point. A pretty good number of brief but hard hitting, no-frills fight scenes pop up in most of the right places, and the final battle, pitting Cynthia up against the last of the villains, is a doozy. It starts in a trashed room, continues up onto the rooftop, makes it way down a bamboo scaffolding (much better than that *Rush Hour 2* bit), and ends up inside another trashed room. Crossing over into comic relief territory, Anthony Wong has a fight scene or two (in which he actually does quite a bit of his own stuff rather than using a double) that provide some minor chuckles, and various other bits and pieces are dropped into the film regularly enough to prevent anyone from taking it too seriously. Blackie's incessant outbursts, however, are more likely to induce eye-rolling and grunts of "shut up", etc. than laughter. As for the filler, well...it's exactly that. Filler. The storyline is moved forward with a minimum of intrigue and there seems to be no end to the number of shots of Cynthia Khan and Kara Hui sitting with their legs crossed while wearing short skirts. Now, mind you, I can think of a good many other things that would have been far less pleasant to look at, but still, most of the "in between" parts of the movie aren't as engaging as they perhaps could have been, even for an unapologetically action-based film such as this.

The version I saw was the DVD from World Video. The good thing about World Video is that they have some of the Jet Li and Yuen Wo-Ping movies on the "Disney endangered list" (and some possible future candidates) uncut and in their original languages. The bad thing about World Video is.....everything else. Their transfers suck, they don't clean up the subtitles, and in this particular case, you can tell that it's just a two-disc VCD release pressed onto a single DVD. The imbedded subtitles jump around, there are two trailers immediately following the credits at the end, and, most damning of all: although the movie itself plays straight through, the DVD chapter and time displays go back to 1 and a string of zeroes about an hour into it! These guys, I'm tellin' ya...they ain't no good. Their prices may be low, but you get what you pay for...(by Numbskull of City on Fire)

**Magic Amethyst (Taiwan, 1990: Lee Tso-Nam)** - Super fun Taiwanese adventure set in India that erratically jumps from fun to nihilism! By the director of other madness like *A Life of Ninja*, *Kung-Fu Wonder Child*, *Magic Warriors*, etc!

A man and his wife run across mysterious Sibelle Hu as she blows two Indian monks away with an exploding mini-crossbow. As one dies, he gives the man a buddha statue and tells him to go to India and give it to a group and he'll



be awarded money. They're pursued by the vastly underused Alexander Lo Rei all the way to India, but then they meet up with Lam Siu-Lau (who is so cute here that it's almost unbearable), her partners, and a group of machine-gun wielding Indian monks.

Quite a bit of action, with a particularly awesome bout on the steps of a temple. People don't just get shot in this-- they get shredded to pieces! There are so many scenes where someone just gets a full clip of a machine-gun, oftentimes after they're on the ground. My sorta party!

Towards the end all the characters are just rendered dispensable and it becomes a complete bloodbath. Exploding cars, swinging from trees, and I swear at one point a guy had a cardboard machine-gun.

There's a lot of really stupid racist jokes about "darkies" uttered by the main dude as well, and he's basically intolerable for most of the movie, but this is otherwise solid, brutal, unpolished action-adventure madness. (by drauch58 of Letterboxd)

**Magic Cop (Hong Kong, 1990: Stephen Tung Wei)** - On the island of Ping Chau, provincial policeman Fung fights and defeats an evil spirit which has been conjured up accidentally. In Hong Kong, Detective Lam and his subordinate Sergeant 22376 are taking part in an operation to break up a drug smuggling operation. A young woman is targeted, but when an attempt is made to arrest her she proves invulnerable to bullets and is not stopped until she is run over by a truck. When it is found that the woman came from Ping Chau, Fung is summoned to Hong Kong, bringing with him his niece, Lin. Lam and 22376 are ordered to work with Fung who, to the deep disbelief of the two young policemen, announces that someone is using zombies to commit crimes. Lam refuses to believe anything Fung says, but 22376 begins to accept that the supernatural is involved. The police officers visit a gym owned by the dead woman's boyfriend, Eddie. Eddie escapes, but Fung uses a magic ritual known as pursuit by charms to locate him. The chase leads to a house belonging to a member of the Chrysanthemum Sect, known for using magic for evil purposes. A battle begins between Fung and his young colleagues and their sinister female opponent, with the souls as well as the lives of the three policemen at stake.

This is a clever and entertaining movie, combining horror and humour with the skill and ease that seems to be the trademark of many Hong Kong filmmakers, and that most of their American counterparts can only dream about. At the heart of the film is the character of Fung, the occult expert whose total honesty and devotion to his cause has next to ruined his career. Though perhaps a little young for the part, Lam Ching Ying is wonderful as Fung. Phil Hardy's "Encyclopaedia Of Horror" describes Fung as "a Taoist Dirty Harry" which, while not an entirely accurate description, does give some of idea of the marvellously deadpan nature of the characterisation. Whether battling the living dead, dealing with the various idiocies of his younger colleagues, or conducting ambiguous conversations with his superior officer, Fung retains the same air of unshakeable determination, giving complete credibility to the scenes of magic that are the highlights of the film. What makes these set-pieces so remarkable is the matter-of-fact way in which they are presented. My personal favorite amongst them is the pursuit by charms, which is conducted in the middle of the street before an audience of amused and fascinated onlookers and involves the involuntary assistance of Sergeant 22376 and the total embarrassment of Detective Lam.

Also memorable is the lengthy battle with a zombie at the morgue, and of course the climactic showdown between Fung and his evil female counterpart. So confident is the handling of these sequences that the filmmakers were totally unafraid to mix the frightening with the absurd, such as the moment when Fung, battling his way out of a locked room, gets his leg stuck in the door; or when 22376, being pursued by a blind demon that hunts by sound, sits on a pincushion. This self-deprecating humour is carried right through to the end when, seeing their mentor stamp his foot on the wharf before boarding his ferry, Fung's thoroughly converted disciples religiously do the same, only to learn that Fung had sand in his shoe. The special effects throughout are first class, and the fight sequences are excellently choreographed. *Magic Cop* is a film that requires viewing on the big screen, or at the very least in a widescreen format, to really do it justice. (by Elizabeth Kingsley)

**Magic Crystal (Hong Kong, 1986: Wong Jing)** - Andy Lau's nephew discovers a big crystal that gives him special powers. When Richard Norton yearns for the Magic Crystal, Lau, Mok, and Rothrock (yea and Wong Jing) face off against him.

What could be the stupidest movie ever made, *Magic Crystal* simply makes up for everything in its super-complex choreography done by the amazing Tony Leung Siu Hung, Bruce Liang's brother for those of you who don't know. With a cast like this you'd expect something more along the lines of a bad *Angel* movie or *Crystal Hunt*, but Leung worked wonders with them. In fact it's probably the best action efforts of Rothrock, Norton, and Lau altogether.

Andy Lau has an introductory fight against a big-haired Chung Faat. The shots tend to be short and choreography simple, with the exception of an acrobatic kicking combination between the two, but Faat's double throws himself all over the place, including a back 3/4 onto the edge of a table. Also watch for the fall into a glass table. It's nothing exceptional as the scene is short and Chung is beaten quickly, but the speed gives you an idea of how the other scenes will go.

In Athens (!!) there's a massive fight scene that involves Mok, Mahler, Rothrock, Leung, Lau and a couple others, including Phillip Ko, WHO DOESN'T FIGHT! WHAT?! It seems like Tony Leung, Wong Jing, a cameraman and the cast all went to Greece for a week or two and shot and choreographed this stuff on the spot. Sometimes a tripod is used, but most of the shots are handheld and very cool looking (considering the rest of the movie isn't done that way). Sometimes you can even see the cameraman's shadow. Mok and Mahler first have a brief scene with some moments of kickboxing bliss and some throws. Next comes Tony Leung's weapon duel against Rothrock. Tony moves around at twice her speed, hence you should only watch him or you'll miss out on someone who never had a great chance at modern action piece. Here, he does it perfectly. Not a single move missed, no movements that go too slow as to be annoying. Taking a fight scene from most HK movies and viewing them repeatedly would finally yield moments where you say to yourself, "They should have fixed that." It could be as simple as a toe pointed in the wrong direction or a diveroll that flops too hard. That doesn't happen in this scene as long as the focus is on HIM. It's just the kind of uninterrupted action madness that we've always wanted in fight scenes. Rothrock still goes through the motions properly but not as well as her cracked-out fireball opponent. It dwarfs Lau's part with the Charlie Chaplin-style umbrella, which still comes off as cool but short.

Andy Lau's fight against some 20 others in the gymnasium suffers from two things; Lau and his partner Chen Pai Hsiang. Lau has a terrible tendency to attack his opponent without looking. He's doubled often, probably by Tony Leung himself because of all the kicks involved. The stuntmen take some serious falls too, one onto bleachers and another is a wirepull that takes a guy 15 feet back into a pommel horse. Chen is annoying and runs around screaming.

Tiny fight in a parking garage first between Lau and Norton (one kick and a little handwork) and then Lau vs a small crowd. The choreography, again, is great and Lau actually looks at the people he fights.

Norton comes into the household and a less-than-likely swordswoman hops to our surprise and takes on his battalion of army men in the confines of a tiny living room. Lots of bodies rolling over each other, some swordplay and general choreography craziness. Norton's scene against the woman is nicely done too. For once he doesn't come off as stiff at all. When Rothrock comes into the house she has some brief, complicated handwork against him until she grabs a sword and, somehow, Leung made it even more complicated. A few shots show Norton's face deep in thought which suggests he's going off memory but, regardless, it looks pretty good. Leung (nice wig) doubles for Norton during most of the kicking parts. Rothrock and the woman team up on Norton and he throws himself around the living room until the scene is over.

All 5 of the main characters go into a warehouse for a big group fight. Rothrock's parts seem weird mainly because of her kicking, which is always swinging crescents. Max Mok has the most impressive, but also the shortest, parts, doing throws and basic things but with some style. Lau does all the elbows without the looking, etc. Don't get your hopes up with the super-flexible villain who faces off against Rothrock; his kicks are mostly swinging crescents (hey, then they're a good match) and lack any power. More than likely he's a dancer cast for the "Flexible Man" role, and he does 3 kicks before getting knocked back against a wall of boxes. Finally Lau has some shots of handwork against Norton, which look awkward sometimes, especially the missing backhands from Norton that stick in the air. Very odd. But I can't complain about the creativity.

The last fight is the one from *Cinema of Vengeance* with the spaceship in the background. The participants in this scene, Rothrock, Norton, and Lau, are pushed along with some of the best choreography I've ever seen. And it's not just simple kickboxing; Rothrock does eagle talon and mantis, Norton does some kind of kung fu. The two of them put on quite a show, especially during the single shots of handwork that go up to 16 moves in length. When Andy Lau enters, the takes become shorter and shorter. Norton pulls out sais and it stays complicated and becomes more painful, with his jabbing the others in the stomach and arms. It's never as simple as one move, block, one move, block; there's always something else happening too. Norton's body is stiff but it doesn't seem to matter. He's fast enough, and he's quite accurate. My only complaint is in his kicks, which are sometimes very bent-legged and, again, stiff. The scene is long and drawn out, with a handfull of HK spins and dizzying action.

I keep asking myself why Andy Lau, Cynthia Rothrock, and Richard Norton were cast with Tony Leung as the choreographer in *Magic Crystal*. It's beyond me. And to think Tony Leung only had one action scene, which was the best part, and Andy Lau had the majority. Very weird. Then again, Wong Jing directed it and I guess it's a blessing that he didn't partake in all the fight scenes himself. Well, luckily Leung was behind the scenes, and without him it would have flop. I'm pretty confident in that. His fight in Greece, Max Mok's brief fight there, and the scenes

between Norton and Rothrock were the highlights. As it is, the action is choreographed amazingly well, and the fights are LONG, though they could have been even better with the right people in front of the camera. For whatever reason, I always complain about that and when the right people are there, the wrong choreographer is directing them. (by Eric Jacobus of the Stunt People)

**Magnificent Warriors (Hong Kong, 1987: David Chung)** - Set in 1938, Ming Ming Foo (MY) is a female aviator who makes black market runs. She is sent to meet with a spy, Agent Sky 1/Lily Wang (YTS) in the Mongolian village of Kaal. The Japanese have designs on the area to build a toxic gas plant. She meets up with the agent and teams up with the young Mongolian lord Youda (LL) and Chin Chin (CL), daughter of a collaborator to thwart the Japanese army.

Fight #1 --- Ming Ming vs villagers - This is an arms deal gone bad. Not the best opening fight but MY throws a few kicks which are cool. Mainly she uses a bullwhip like nobody's business. She ought to give Indiana Jones some lessons.

Fight #2 --- Ming Ming vs 2 Chinese army officers - Great fight!!! Starts off hand-to-hand in a 2-on-1. Good choreography that only gets better when MY uses a rope dart against on fellow with a sword. It's fantastic choreography that ends with a killer fall.

Fight #3 --- Chin Chin vs Mongolian thug - Not a bad fight. There's a little wire-work but she shows talent. The choreography is fast and smooth and she's very agile.

Fight #4 --- Ming Ming vs 2 Mongolian thugs - It's very short but MY throws some good kicks.

Fight #5 --- Ming Ming and Sky 1 vs 2 Japanese agents - Good fight!!! MY throws 2 jump-spinning roundhouse kicks that are so sweet! 1 Japanese agent is played by Billy Chow who is wicked bad with a katana. There's good exchanges and hard falls. Great choreography!

Fight #6 --- Ming Ming vs Chin Chin's dad - Short fight but good. Lots of kicks; MY makes use of her bag as a weapon against his knife. With this would've played out longer.

Fight #7 --- Sky 1 vs 2 Mongol lords - Decent fight. Good falls and smooth choreography. MY shows up to deliver a couple of kicks and aid in escape.

Fight #8 --- Ming Ming vs Mongolian & Japanese soldiers - Great fight!!! This is full of some really good choreography! MY fights on the run, segueing from hand-to-hand to Chinese spear at times. There's some really cool kicks on display here and some great falls.

Fight #9 --- End Fight - Village of Kaal vs Japanese army invasion. It's a ton of action with great fights throughout! MY and CL team up to take on Japanese elite guards. Great choreography and kicks from MY. The best fight is against HJL who plays a Mongolian collaborator. It's so good but, man, it could've been so much more. Hey, I'll take what I can get.

It's a fun period piece romp. There's plenty of action so you won't get easily bored. The acting is very hammy at times, especially the meet cute between Ming Ming and Sky 1. The comedic elements don't really work for me, especially the slapstick bits. The plot isn't too bad. I actually think this could only be improved if the film as a whole had a more dramatic tone to it. Yeoh's character is a sort of female "Asian Hawk". Wish she'd been fleshed out a little more.

But this is an action-driven movie and you get plenty of it. Michelle Yeoh is fantastic here. I would've loved for there to have been a serious 1-on-1 throwdown between her and Hwang Jang Lee. I bet it would've been a classic.

If you don't have this or have never seen, track it down and GET IT!!!!!! (by Scott Blasingame)

**Mahjong Dragon (Hong Kong, 1996: Jeff Lau, Corey Yuen)** - Directed by Corey Yuen and Jeff Lau. A very modern, smart, fresh, late 1990s action comedy that earns the highest ranking on every level. Should appeal to both fans of current HK cinema (it's well produced/directed/acted) and martial arts fans. Story: a quirky gambling-addicted, aging Hong Kong cop (Josephine Siao) gets set up in a marriage of convenience to a mainland Chinese master card

player and super fighter (Chiu Man Cheuk). The two of them, and their respective families and jumbled romantic interests, get caught up in a mess involving Chiu's former triad colleagues.

This summary doesn't begin to do justice to how well the movie works. The fun comes from touching, laugh-out-loud funny and engaging characters and a plot that works the chemistry well. A multi-dimensional and sparkling performance from Josephine Siao carries it. One of Chiu Man Cheuk's finest performances as well (Corey Yuen gets the best out of him). Finale is a big battle between Chiu and Kenneth Lo that is reminiscent of the climax of *Bodyguard from Beijing*; furious wu shu-laced wildness that is wire-enhanced and not realistic (being kicked in the air, flipping and landing on one arm?), but fun. Lo does his crazy kicking (first time since *Drunken Master 2*). Trust me, you will have a great time watching this one. (by the Martial Artist's Guide to Hong Kong Films)

**Marianna (Hong Kong, 1982: Cheuk Ang-Tong)** - This is another one of those 1980s films that I think must have been financed by the HK Tourist Board. Their motto might be "Stay at Home. It's a Scary World Out There!". The basic theme of these films is that when a Hongie travels outside of China – in particular to the exotic lands of South East Asia – there is danger lurking – death waiting.

This fairly unknown Sally Yeh movie may have been her very first film and it co-stars Chin Han – best known to Western audiences for his pairings with Brigitte Lin – both on screen and off – during the 1970's. The film takes a while before it gets cranked up, but the last thirty minutes turns into a savage, brutal and frightening fight for survival among the wilds of the Philippines.

Chin Han – Sally's husband – goes off on a business trip to the Philippines leaving his lovely wife and two children behind him. While conducting business there he saves a desperate girl from a number of pursuers. The girl is Marianna and she is the cause of a deadly rivalry between two native tribes. The leader of one of the tribes wants to marry her, but Marianna and her tribe wants nothing to do with them.

Marianna escapes to HK where she finds Chin Han and persuades him to hire her as a maid so that she can hide out. Sally isn't too keen on the idea especially when she comes home unexpectedly one day and finds her husband and Marianna playing house in the maid's room. Chin Han had boasted earlier on to his male colleagues that he was "promiscuous but had never been caught yet". His luck just ran out.

Sally leaves HK to visit her relatives in the Philippines and Chin Han follows to make amends. They decide to go off on a road trip where hopefully they can begin again. But this is the Philippines and road trips away from civilization are never a good idea. Their scenic tour goes askew immediately and soon turns into a horrific nightmare. First some kids drain most of the gas from their car and they soon find themselves out of gas and surrounded by a band of grasping zombie like lepers. Events though take a turn even for the worse as they fall into the hands of the tribe that is after Marianna.

At this point the film becomes extremely violent and gory as Chin Han, Sally, Marianna and some of her tribesmen fight their way out with machetes and spears and run for their lives in the jungles with a tribe after them with vengeance on their minds.

It's always a pleasure locating an obscure film such as this and it turned out to be much better than I expected. Considering that this might be Sally's first role, she does a terrific job as she goes from pampered housewife to jealous outrage to total panic and fear. I believe that is also Sally who sings a couple songs for the soundtrack.

The VCD has subs and the quality of the transfer goes from poor at times (in particular the dark interior or night scenes) to at other times looking quite good. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Master, The (Hong Kong, 1989/1992: Tsui Hark)** - Martial Arts Master Chan Hou Tak(Yuen Wah), runs a Chinese Medicinal shop in a rough deprived area of L.A. A former renegade student of his named Johnny(Jerry Trimble), turns up with his gang and starts causing trouble for the old master. When it looks like thing's can't get any worse for Master Chan, a loyal former student called Kit(Jet Li), turns up in L.A in search of him.

Kit- "I read your letter, I knew something was wrong"  
Master Chan- "That wasn't a letter, that was my will"

Jet Li leaps onto the mean streets of L.A in this Tsui Hark directed actioner from Golden Harvest studios. The film was shelved for some-time after it was first completed. Some reviews claim the film was shot in 1989 others 1990,

I'm not sure just how long this movie was held back for?. Yet it's safe to say that the executives at Golden Harvest were not impressed with Tsui Hark's work. While the production is no masterpiece like Hark's **Zu Warriors From Magic Mountain**(1983), it's still far from being the worst Hong Kong movie. Sure the plot and direction are a little weak and some characters can grate. Yet I prefer this to many of Jet Li's other classics in terms of the fight choreography. Sure Jet's appeared in better films, but he's rarely looked this good without excessive use of wires. It's also a nice change to see a Hong Kong production filmed entirely in the States, like the Kurt McKinney film **No Retreat No Surrender**(1986).

Now let's take a look at the film's real strength, the fight scenes staged by the talented team of Yuen Wah and Brandy Yuen(**Legend Of A Fighter**). While most of the action is performed in the distinctive Hong Kong style, it's clearly had some influence from American action cinema too. In many of the fights, opponents will stay down after a single hit. The best example of this is when Kit and Master Chan faces Johnny students in the finale. An excellent fight fest that I'll get back to later in the review. Most of the action does have that Hong Kong flair to it, with the use of flips, and wires for the more super human feats we see onscreen. The fact they used mainly U.S stuntmen including a very young **Billy Blanks**, most certainly had an influence on the fights. Maybe the American influence was one of the reasons Golden Harvest took such a dislike to the movie?. Yuen Wah stated in an interview with **Hong Kong Legends** that they played to the strengths of the foreign Martial Artists. This probably explains why some of the fights are pretty quick and to the point.

The reason I've covered this film is for the presence of Kickboxing legend Jerry Trimble, as mullet clad gweilo student gone bad. This was his third screen appearance, and Trimble was no stranger to Asian productions having starred in **King Of The Kickboxers**(1990). He certainly looks on top form here thanks to Yuen Wah, Brandy Yuen and his own fantastic Tae Kwon Do/Kickboxing skills. He has a great fight with Yuen Wah in a dimly lit Chinese medicinal store, Trimble may have been doubled for some of the more elaborate moves?. Which is probably why the scene is poorly lit in parts. That said, it's still a great intro to his character, with him smashing up the store with his hands and feet. While I've yet to watch all of the American stars movies. From the films I have viewed, he looks more dynamic in the Asian productions.

Another highlight see's Trimble fighting Jet Li on top of a police car. According to Yuen Wah, there was a lot of communication problems on set and at times friction between Jerry and Jet. Yet this doesn't come across on screen, as the two perform really well together. The language barrier must have caused so many problems for the cast and crew. It's easy to see why the final film ended up being a little muddled in terms of story and characters. Yet despite this the choreographers and stunt crew still managed to create some really fast and exciting screen combat. The best example of this being the movie's epic finale.

Filmed on top of an L.A skyscraper, Johnnys small army of thugs await the film heroes to turn up and save Anna(Anne Rickitts). Before Kit turns up, an ill Master Chan takes on the thugs himself. It's great to see the charismatic Yuen Wah break out some bone crunching moves. Despite being ill his character still manages to fend off the Jerry's lackeys without breaking a sweat. In one sequence, Wah does a neat backwards roll that turns into a kick as he lands on his back. He makes the move look effortless even though it requires a lot of skill and experience to perform.

Things really start to kick off when Kit arrives to try and even up the odds. Finally confronting Johnny in a frantic and violent confrontation that turns into a boiler room brawl. The final encounter is certainly more elaborate, with longer takes of more complex moves. The action directors also make clever use of broken glass in two of the movie's fights. Most action films have no shortage of broken glass, that rarely hampers the characters actions. Here it's given more focus, with the characters soft soled shoes hindering them at times. While it doesn't reach the same levels as the finale of **Police Story**(1985), I thought it was a nice touch to some of the action.

Crystal Kwok who played Jackie Chan's attractive and under-appreciated assistant in **Dragons Forever**(1988), plays the love interest here. She is given a lot more screen time in this one, but again she doesn't get involved in any fights. Like many of the male and female characters in the film, we don't get to learn that much about her. Anne Rickitts who plays Master Chan's friend Anna also suffers from the same problem. She plays a very spirited character who just appears to be there to care for Yuen Wah's character. Yet we don't get to learn how they became such good friends in the first place?. These are good examples of the film's weaker elements.

There's a great comedic turn from Korean To Wai-Wo(Tower Of Death) as a cowardly Master Arts master. Fans should also look out for the huge Greek Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu expert, Stefanos Miltsakakis. He has a small minor role as one of Johnny's henchmen who is clearly a parody of Arnold Schwarzenegger, complete with crew cut and Austrian accent. He has appeared in five Jean Claude Van Damme films including **Cyborg** and **Maximum Risk**. American

Martial Artist Dale Jacoby(Ring Of Fire), can also be spotted playing one of the lackeys. Despite Jacoby's and Stefanos genuine Martial Arts skills, neither of them get time to shine in this film.

The Master might not be a classic movie or the best production to come from Golden Harvest. Yet its a must see if you are fan of Jet Li, Yuen Wah and Jerry Trimble. It's a great showcase for their physical talents, even if the rest of the movie does not hold up. Tsui Hark may have done better movies but it still has his unique stamp on the film. There's also some amazing stunt work, including Jet Li jumping over some construction barriers like an Olympic hurdler. They also drafted in a op Hollywood stuntman who did the hose pipe leap in **Die Hard**(1988) to work on the movie.

The version of the movie I watched was from Hong Kong Legends and the print looks and sounds superb. I highly recommend this release of the film, for anyone wishing to seek this one out. Yuen Wah is one of the actors interviewed for the discs special features. A lot of the facts featured in this review are taken from that very interview. (by DragonClaws of KFF)

**Midnight Angel (Hong Kong, 1990: Jonathan Chik) - aka *The Legend of Heroism*** - The "all things to all people" rule in HK films strikes again with mostly postive but at some times muddled results in MIDNIGHT ANGEL aka THE JUSTICE WOMEN. It has plenty of action, pathos, drama, comedy, and even a helping of romance. Unfortunately, sometimes it doesn't give enough of each of those ingredients until the last half-hour, and before then it's almost an unstable mix. Fortunately, the makers of this movie garnered some heavy-caliber talent to make this film more than worthy of watching!

The film is an ensemble piece...the story opens with the birthday party of an elderly gentlemen (the immortal "Mr. Han" himself, Shek Kin!) thrown by his three adopted granddaughters (Yukari Oshima, May Lo, and Angile Leung). The eldest and middle daughters (Yukari and Angile, respectively) are cops, and Yukari's character is engaged to be married to a fellow officer, Tak (Mark Cheng). Unfortunately, the unexpected hits hard when Cheng and Oshima lead a bust with their commanding officer (Miu Kiu Wai) on a drug deal that gets derailed by a ruthless criminal named Bull (Melvin Wong). Tak seems to be killed in the ensuing chaos, and Yukari is so inconsolable she's transferred to clerical work. Angile and Miu do their best to continue tracking down Bull in spite of unusual orders from on high (in the form of Eddy Ko in an extended cameo) to stop chasing after the villain, but in the meantime the youngest sister (May Lo) -- who feels for Yukari and is angry about a chance encounter with a wifebeating scumbag on the street -- decides to become a vigilante, calling herself Cotton Flower after a little trinket she drops for every innocent she helps out!

As Cotton Flower's adventures progress and the hunt for Bull continues, Yukari gets a surprise visit from Tak, who it turns out (barely) survived his brush with death and was sent on a secret mission to get the goods on Bull! (Needless to say, their flame is still burning.) Then Miu gets the bright -- but incorrect -- idea thanks to circumstances that Yukari is the vigilante! Then the paths of Cotton Flower and Bull cross. With a bang. Ultimately (and without spoiling things too much for you), things explode and all three sisters must take desperate measures to stop Bull once and for all!

As you could probably tell, somebody forgot to keep things simple and as a result there's a few too many threads and twists in the story, and not enough action! But when the action hits, it hits...Yukari Oshima is in this movie, after all, and as good as she's ever been! There are some flashes of brilliance in this movie...one takes place when the inevitable occurs and Yukari finds out kid sister is Cotton Flower; May thinks she can take care of herself but she gets her butt handed to her by Yukari in an impromptu fight, and Shek Kin watches thinking they're just having a friendly sparring match as they tear up the living room!

Recommended, especially for Yukari Oshima fans!

NOTE! Yukari made a shot-on-video film that costarred Chin Siu Ho (FIST OF LEGEND) in 1999 called IT TAKES A THIEF which almost carbon-copied the themes of MIDNIGHT ANGEL, but with a few significant differences! Yukari gives one of her best dramatic performances in this film. (Don't worry, she also kicks a LOT of butt!) Of course this film comes recommended, too! (by CaptainAmerica of HKMDB)

**Mighty Gambler, The (Hong Kong, 1992: Tony Liu)** - Shila and Feng have playing against each other since childhood. Shila grows up to run her family's casino and, for a time, seems not to be tough enough to make the grade. Feng gains control of her casino. Will there be revenge ? You can bet on it !

AKA *Sibelle Got a Shotgun*. Yes that means the movie has pretty much nothing to do with gambling and ends on an explosive shout-out and epic fights. Is that really a surprise to anyone at this point? Came for the martial arts, stayed for Sibelle ruthlessly managing a business Godfather-style and one-hand wielding a shotgun like she's Chow Yun-Fat or something. All of this along with an ending straight out of *Mission Impossible II*, except it wouldn't come out for another 8 years.

What about the fights?

Not much happens for the first part of the movie, until Michiko Nishiwaki arrives by train and beats up some thugs. Almost all the fights in this movie involve Michiko somehow.

She fights with thugs like 3 different times. Outside, in a bar, and in a house. Every time it's pretty cool!

And then the 2 final sequences back-to-back involve shoot-outs and good fighting as well, early 90's Hong Kong so you can't go wrong with the fights in this.

Summary

Stunts - 92/100 | What's with Hong Kong and their obsession with broken glass? Not that I'm complaining!

Narrative - 62/100 | No HK B-movie would be complete without the Annoying Character™ coming in for a 20-minutes ride and almost sinking the boat for an equal amount of time. Fortunately though, the movie recovers quite well by the time that character is out of the story (also a HK staple).

Fight Choreography - 90/100 | The arrival and presence of Michiko Nishiwaki at some point lifts the fights in this movie from nonexistent to kinda crazy. So much gratuitous violence! By the way she round-house kicks a machete into someone's chest from the other side of the room, so I'll let you determine if this movie is worth your time based on this.

Enjoyment - 71/100 | Alex Fong is juicy as the villain so no way I'm gonna dislike this.

This movie is basically a HK trash B-movie version of *The Godfather*, complete with the family drama, passive-aggressive power struggles, casino investments, and trigger-happy mob bosses... but with martial arts. Pretty sure Sibelle Hu won a Hong Kong award for this role, can't find a source though. (by Daxtreme of KFF)

**Millenium Dragon (Hong Kong, 2000: Philip Ko Fei)** - Stars Yuen Biao (billed as Yuen Bill), Siu-Hou Chin (a poor man's Sammo Hung and I do mean poor). This is billed as a cross between James Bond and Mission: Impossible (NOT!). English Subs in white lettering making them hard to read with poor grammar and translation in places. DVD copy is from a VHS with tracking issues. The sound is often muffled and/or muted.

It's a convoluted plot that has something to do with Chinese antiques and a mystical pearl but predominantly takes place in Russia. There are scenes in public places but they are always deserted of people. People who've never met know each other via other characters so as to introduce other necessary characters. This involves Mongolians, Chinese, Russians, and South Koreans.

The Action (oh, good grief, the action): Some fights are shot from oblique angles with quick cuts. Some are overly undercranked.....severely. Ching predominately handles the fights unfortunately. Yuen Biao spends the movie (what little he's in of it) in a white parka and red hunting cap. He has 2 fights (if you'd call them that and I don't) in which he throws a total of 3 kicks and 2 punches and performs 0 acrobatics. None. Though he's involved in 1 major gun battle, he seems to prefer to shoot at people than fight them. In truth, though his name is on the cover and he's given star billing, he only gets about 15-20 minutes screen time and is actually a minor character in the movie. THIS IS NOT A YUEN BIAO MOVIE!!!!

I watched this movie 10 years ago and thought maybe I didn't remember it very well and decided to give it another look. There won't be a third. AVOID THIS!!!!!!!!!!!!!! (by Scott Blasingame)

**Millionaire's Express, The (Hong Kong, 1986: Sammo Hung) – aka Shanghai Express** - Ching Fong Tin (SH) is the ne'er-do-well son of the little town of Hanshui. He returns to atone for his past mistakes by planning to dynamite the railroad so that the train, the Millionaire's Express, will stop thus forcing its passengers to avail themselves of the town's amenities. He is opposed by Hanshui's new security chief, Tsao Cheuk Kin (YB), an upright man of law and order. Aboard the train are gangsters who are determined to steal a map from 3 Japanese samurai. In addition to that, the town is invaded by the gangsters' bandits seeking to plunder both the townsfolk and passengers.

Fight #1 --- Sammo Hung vs Yuen Biao - This occurs at the train stop where Biao finds Sammo stringing the dynamite. This fight is so good! Both take some great falls and their exchanges are hard-hitting. There's great impact, especially with regards to the kicks. A couple of my faves are when Biao jumps off the platform into Sammo's back kick and then later Biao performs a flying scissor-leg takedown to Sammo's head.

Fight #2 --- Big Finale w/Multiple End Fights - Wow, there's a lot going on here! There are lots of mini-fights and stunts. Yukari Oshima takes on a bunch of the bandits with some neat swordplay. Richard Norton and Yasuaki Kurata pair off and while it's a fun fight, I wish it had been just a little more involved. But the best are....

Yuen Biao vs Dick Wei: This is just fantastic and full of great boot work. It starts in the hotel lobby and moves up the stairs and onto a balcony. Biao's acrobatics come into play and he's amazing.

Sammo Hung vs Cynthia Rothrock: I love this fight! And, man, does Sammo take a beating! CR really get to demonstrate her strength in kicking. What makes this so good though is Sammo's performance as he gets worked up during the course of the fight and then finishes it off with a good scolding.

Sammo & Biao vs Hwang Jang Lee: This is short but excellently choreographed. I would've loved for this to run a lot longer, but Sammo and Biao execute a sweet double-team on HJL.

There's a lot of action and stunts strewn throughout the film. One of the best is at the introduction of Biao's character and he performs a cartwheel off the roof of a 2-story burning building in a single one-shot take. The camera hangs back for the stunts and then moves in for his dialogue, so there is no doubt as to his execution of the stunt. I love this guy.

There's also lots of hijinks and slapstick/situational comedy. Some of it works, some doesn't. But Eric Tsang owns me in this movie, especially early on. He's a corrupt security chief and so condescending and abusive of his men.

I have a vhs version of this by the title **The Shanghai Express**. There are some scenes I remember from it that aren't in this. One is Rosamund Kwan's infatuation with Biao's character in a number of scenes. Then I want to say there is a scene set in the bandits' camp where some fool thinks he can put the moves on Rothrock and she quickly dispels him of that notion. I thought I might find a clip on Youtube but no luck. (Am I remembering any of this wrong?)

This is one of my favorite ensemble cast films. The fights in it are one of the reasons I love Sammo and Biao. I don't know that it matters what version you may find, just get your hands on it. I don't think you'll be disappointed with whichever one you score. GET IT! GET IT! GET IT! (by Scott Blasingame)

**Miracles (Hong Kong, 1989: Jackie Chan) - aka Mr. Canton & Lady Rose; The Canton Godfather; Black Dragon** - Set in the 1930's, JC plays Cheng Wah Kuo, a country boy new to Hong Kong. He happens to save a gang boss from an attempted hit. But when the boss stills dies, authority of the gang is mistakenly thrust upon Cheng. He assumes leadership, tries to steer the gang into legitimacy, hires Luming Yang (AM) as a nightclub singer/moll, and must ultimately contend with the rival gang boss, Tiger (CHK), and a traitor within his own organization, Fei (LL).

Fight #1 --- Cheng vs 2 goons - This is very, very brief but foreshadows what is to come. Love the way he deftly twirls a flower basket over the head of an opponent and yanks him back.

Fight #2 --- Cheng vs 2 of his own gang members at the nightclub - This is a fight in order for Cheng to demonstrate his fighting ability. It's short but serves to whet your appetite even more. It ends with a beautiful, flourishing combination: a tornado kick into a reverse crescent kick then dropping into a forward leg sweep. I can watch this over and over. JC makes it look so effortless; it just flows so beautifully.



Fight #3 --- Cheng vs Tiger's gang #1 - This occurs at Tiger's restaurant where a meeting takes place to "encourage" Cheng to sign over half his nightclub's profits. This is fantastic choreography in Chan's typical fashion. I wonder how many takes it took to capture some of these actions on film. The flow and editing are superb. Chan's ability to fight while on the run is thrilling to watch and his maneuvers and use of props are ingenious. Great fight!!!

Fight #4 --- Cheng vs Tiger's gang #2 - This takes place in an outdoor marketplace in the cobblestone alleys. This is fantastically laced with feats of agility. The choreography is full of comedic bits, great use of props, and stunts; the best of which takes place incorporating the use of rickshaws. (JC suffered a deep cut over his left eye performing a stunt in this segment as seen in the outtakes during the end credits. In the film, it appears that another stuntman performs the feat and almost suffers the same injury.) You can't help but to smile at the amazing physical humor Chan displays here.

Fight #5 --- Cheng vs Tiger's gang #3 - This takes place at a rope factory. Billy Chow, as one of the workers, serves as JC's main opponent. This is just phenomenal!!! What an ingenious location to stage a fight!!! The choreography is rife with fighting, falls, and stunts. It's astounding and complex! This is probably one of my favorite fight sequences of all Chan's films! 2 standout pieces are: a) JC leaping about and kicking at 3 foes with a rope tied to his right ankle all the while entangling them and a triple kick combo against Billy Chow consisting of a jump-spinning back kick into a crouching back sweep into a standing spinning back kick. That equals 3 full rotations!!! I LOVE IT!!!!!!

This is a great film. And it has some really funny moments in it. The only problem I have with it is that I struggle to get through the middle of it because the focus is on situational comedy rather than the action. Still, it's worth it for the end fights. One of the fun bits in watching this is seeing JC play with his fedora; the way he flips it, twirls it, and tosses it without looking to hang it up. The end credits show outtakes from some of the scenes though not as many of the action ones as I'd have liked. Oh, that he could develop a project similar to this to do today. This is Chan in his prime! GET THIS! GET THIS! GET THIS! (by Scott Blasingame)

**Mirage (Hong Kong/PRC, 1987: Tsui Siu-Ming)** - Tong Ting Hsin (YR-G), a photographer and explorer, captures the mirage of a beautiful girl on film when Russian raiders attack his party on the Silk Road. He enlists his friend Mao Da Wei (TS-M) to help seek her out only to discover that the reality of who she is may be nothing like the allure of her mirage.

Fight #1 --- Opening battle - Huge melee!!! This is rife with both gunfights and hand-to-hand. There are some insane stunts here, like the rock wall of a cliff crumbling onto one man as he and 3 other rappel down, or a man hiding in a wooden crate where a load detonates to throw him out of it. It's really too much to describe. It has to be seen.

Fight #2 --- Tong (YR-G) & Mao (TS-M) vs gangsters - Good fight! Starts in a restaurant and spills out into the street. It's a great brawl full of impacts and falls, almost verging on that "basher" quality, but doesn't. There are more insane stunts involving a motorcycle, especially a jump through a neon sign with a gangster straddling the front tire. Wild!!!!

Fight #3 --- Tong vs Bartok (WH) - The fight is pretty good with a couple of really neat falls and equipped with some comedic value. One particular fall YR-G takes is quite impressive.

Fight #4 --- Tong vs rival clansmen - It's short, but full of good kicks and exchanges.

Fight #5 --- Tong vs #1 Warrior - Sword fight!!!! And quite a good one, too! I mean it's almost scary to watch the way these guys are hacking at each other. It's fast with kicks interspersed throughout and some more hard falls.

Fight #6 --- Jailbreak - Oh, this is wild!!! Mao arrives to free Tong. TS-M is really fun to watch here as he takes out a number of bandits, at one point executing a sweet jump-spinning crescent kick. The escape evolves into a chase with Mao in a Jeep and Tong on a motorcycle followed by the gang of bandits on horses, all amid a myriad of explosions. It's like the stuntmen didn't know or couldn't remember where the loads were planted, and kept driving or riding over them. It's crazy!...but not as crazy as TS-M's finale stunt to the whole sequence. The man drives his Jeep off a cliff while being snatched from it by a rope around his waist. It's shot from a distance but not so far you can't tell that it's no dummy pulled from the plunging vehicle. It's a real person. (I kept watching this bit over and over. It's mind-boggling.)

Fight #7 --- Tong vs Gaza Nova (PR) - Man, this is just brutal! This chick is nuts! The choreography is full of dynamic kicks and hard falls! It's set on a desert mountain, and spliced with scenes of their horse fighting just as viciously as they are.

Fight #8 --- End fight - Oh...my...word!!!! It's another huge melee! Again it's a mixture of stunt work and fighting; more stunts actually, but the fight sequences are hard-hitting with YR-G and PR mixing it up once again. But that is all secondary to some of the stunts that TS-M puts himself in, including: falls, diving out a second story window as the building explodes, and setting himself on fire to ride a motorcycle.

This movie is fantastic! I enjoyed every aspect about it. It has some funny moments, but isn't belabored with the typical campy Chinese humor we usually see. The acting is really good, and superbly cast. The locations are killer. It's filmed in the northern and northwestern regions of China, and the locals are arid and desolate, which make from some dusty action sequences.

And the plot is great. (This may be a bit of a spoiler, but I can't help it. I love irony.) The mirage Tong sees that sets his heart on the search for this mystery woman. Something about her captivates him. Yet when he finally finds her, she turns out be the queen of the bandits who are raiding the Silk Road. She is not the winsome, demure beauty of his dreams, but a woman who thrives on her beauty, wealth, and power. She offers him all those things, but her vicious coldbloodedness, her inhumanity, dispels the illusion he thought her to be. He prefers the mirage to the reality of her. I love that!!!!

Yu Rong-Guog is fantastic in the lead role of Tong. I've seen him in many films, always the supporting player. Here he stars, and he shines. I've always thought him a good screen fighter, but he absolutely blows me away in this showing an agility and dexterity I didn't know he was capable of.

Tsui Siu-Ming astounded me in every capacity he undertook. He's a good director, a great choreographer, and an impressive screen fighter and stunt performer. In this he actually reminds me a good deal of Sammo Hung, both in appearance and performance. If you can't think of him off the top of your head, he starred as the disgraced and blackmailed monk who was one of the lead characters in *The Buddhist Fist*. I will be seeking out more of his films. Check out his HKMDB page.

This is a stunt heavy film, equally balanced with some good, solid fight choreography. I cannot impress upon you enough to...GET THIS!!!!!! (by Scott Blasingame)

**Mismatched Couples (Hong Kong, 1985: Yuen Woo-Ping)** - Donnie Yen plays Eddie, a goofy breakdancer who lives with his aunt and works in a restaurant. Yuen Wo Ping moves in with him, Gary Chau challenges him to breakdancing dances, and Dick Wei finds the "ultimate opponent" in him!

What a fun movie. I don't care how dorky or "nerdy" it is. And I certainly don't give a damn how "wrong" Donnie's breakdancing moves are or how his head doesn't move properly. I found it EXTREMELY fun and the comedy (again corny); so enjoyable, filled with Yuen Wo Ping goofiness and practically everything in the movie is either comedic or, comedic... Mismatched Couples is the kind of movie that can bring you out of a depression overnight, filling you with either laughter or the thought, "Damn, glad I'm not THAT dumb looking."

The credits have a cool bunch of moves, Donnie puts on a show in the street for some girls, jumps up and down on the top of a car and electrocutes himself with a power box. Sadly after this, the movie becomes cropped and we get a nice un-widescreen presentation... thanks a lot.

Donnie in his room: what can he possibly do here? How about playing with a remote control car that he hides behind his bookshelf, breakdancing while he does it? BEYOND dorky (and of course I like it). Stupid humor that makes no sense because it's so simple and basic. Also it seems like Sam Wong passes by outside.

Yuen Wo Ping's appearance, he's selling bamboo and does a stick routine with it while a dumb American takes pictures. I have to add that Yuen Wo Ping at this time was one of the ugliest people I've ever seen. But he can swing a stick around pretty well, doing what may be monkey staff only not too complicated looking. Afterwards, Yuen is trapped along a line connecting Donnie's bike to a tough girl's bike, and Yuen drops his bread and it's run over by a truck. \*bowwowow.... sound effect\*. And THEN a breakdancing scene. Gary Chau does a few moves and then Yuen

Wo Ping (actually his double, which is most likely Brandy Yuen Jan Yeung, or perhaps Yuen Yat Chor for a moment) does a beautiful airtrack followed by a half dozen butterflies done to perfection.

After a bunch of comedy concerning Yuen Wo Ping moving in with Donnie and trying not to be seen by his aunt, Gary Chau meets up with his friend (don't know the name but he's a wushu pro), and they do some breaking in an airport. The white guy does some GREAT moves, very acrobatic and fast. An old man challenges them too and he's even surprised by the white guy's moves. Good stuff, kind of a kung fu metaphor.

THE tennis scene. Don't mix Wo Ping and Jan Yeung with a sport or you get insanity as the result. It's ridiculous. The white guy does a side somersault over the net, and Donnie finds it necessary to grab a bike to beat him. Someone else does the bike tricks for Donnie, which (to someone who doesn't do bike tricks) are pretty cool especially when they actually hit the tennis ball. Obviously the workings of the Yuen street performers.

Another breakdance scene where Donnie goes against the white guy. Mostly undercranked but nonetheless some good moves. Donnie does some windmills, an arial and a weird move in the air where he hops up and at the peak turns around 3/4 onto his back. The white guy does some good stuff as well but not as much. Fun.

The "finale" where Donnie fights Dick Wei is full of everything. There's a bit of fighting, some stuntwork, comedy, and PAIN! Dick Wei is purely insane, and Donnie puts up a bit of a fight but does the stuntwork. They start out in the ring and have a couple cuts of very fast boxing (undercranked too) with good kicks, Dick Wei falls out of the ring repeatedly and can't get up for a while and finally kicks Donnie out of the ring, where he does an insane fall against the wall that injured his right shoulder. You can see it happen when he hits the ground. Also you can see he's either holding his right arm or keeping it from hitting the ground for the rest of the scene. Dick Wei goes even more crazy, claiming a trophy stack as his own, getting in a fight with a suit of armour (which doesn't fight back), and then Donnie convinces him that he can prove how tough he is if he can break out of super-thick rope. He can't, and Donnie leaves.

You either hate this movie or really enjoy it. If you're not into street performances and the other stuff that the Yuen Clan is so good at, you'll probably think this is rubbish and for kids. The humor is light-weight, the idea of the movie is for play only, and the action isn't too bad. The end fight has a load of good looking moves and some nasty falls, but not too much long fighting except in the ring. But overall, I still think it's still highly entertaining, just like a street show. (by Eric Jacobus of the Stunt People)

**Mission, The (Hong Kong, 1999: Johnnie To)** - "I only knew what filmmaking was about when making *The Mission*" – Johnnie To

1999 was a breakout year for Johnnie To. He started off with the underrated *Where a Good Man Goes*, but it was the next two films that would help raise his status as an auteur. The commercial success of *Running Out of Time* was followed by the critical success of *The Mission* (which was not a commercial success) where he would win best director at the Hong Kong Film Awards, Golden Bauhinia Awards and Golden Horse Film. It follows a pattern of To filming more personal projects which were funded by the more popular fare of his co-owned production company Milkyway. *The Mission* was invited along with two other To titles to the Berlin Film Festival after Ulrich Gregor saw the film. This led to more Milkyway titles being shown at various cinematic events.

The Chinese title (鎗火) translates to gunfire. I prefer the English title which refers more to the homosocial nature of the team aspects in this film (a theme also explored in other To films like *PTU* and *Exiled*). In many ways this was a typical Hong Kong production. It took 18 days to film, cost about 320,000 American dollars (2.5 million HK dollars) to make and there was no script. It sounds like a recipe for disaster, but the results were atypical. What was created was an elliptical, sometimes enigmatic yet energetic film about honor and languor among lower triad members. It is among my top 50 Hong Kong movies of all-time.

The film has a simple yet elegant structure to it. You can break it into three acts, but it really consists of a prologue (five minutes), the main act (58 minutes) and a coda (21 minutes; or you can consider this the second act.) There is a prologue which economically shows all five of the main characters who will later be hired as bodyguards. Afterwards there is an interesting use of having the shootout start and background noises in the credits which starts the main mission. Then there is a minor mission as the coda.

The main mission which takes the majority of the film is started when a triad boss Lung (Eddy Ko Hung: *The Thundering Mantis*) has an attempt on his life by unknown assailants. His brother Frank (Simon Yam: *PTU*) hires five bodyguards (Curtis: Anthony Wong, Roy: Francis Ng, Shin: Jackie Lui, Mike: Roy Cheung, James: Lam Suet) to protect

him. They are basically sequestered until whoever is behind the attempts on Lung is found and removed as a threat. This means hours of just sitting around, playing pranks and doing menial chores like chauffeuring Mrs. Lung. This is most exemplified by the most famous scene where the bodyguards kick a paper ball back and forth to each other while waiting for Mr. Lung. It writes banal but it comes across as exhilarating as the chatter between Vincent and Jules in *Pulp Fiction* (itself a scene reminiscent of *Shoot the Piano Player*). The scenes of boredom reminds me of pertinent aspects of several jobs that are rarely filmed such as police officers, private investigators where you have hours of tedium sometimes followed by intense life-and-death activities like the assassination attempts in this film.

Small spoilers ahead in this paragraph: Surprisingly the mission is wrapped up quicker than you might realize. However, this leads to the coda where their codes of work and honor will be tested. To had two different endings for the film. The bleak ending was not used because the past several post-handover films from Milkway like *The Longest Nite* and *Expect the Unexpected* had doleful endings. He wanted to make his films lighter.

This is a must watch for not just Hong Kong film fans, but anyone who studies cinema as well. Fans of action might be put off by the static compositions and use of lethargic pacing. To's mix is akin to combining John Woo and Michelangelo Antonioni. Where else do you see *jianghu* (literally translated as rivers and lakes but it is an idiom that means the fictional universe inhabited within a wuxia or gangster movie) concepts mixed with malaise? But with this film To showed that he was an auteur and a brilliant one at that who could mix a variety of seemingly incompatible influences into a genre film and create one of the unique films of the era. If there is a weakness to me it is the soundtrack. Sometimes the minimalist electronic beats are effective and sometimes it comes off as reminiscent of the computerized scores prevalent in the 1980s though sometimes the beat is strangely catchy. It is but a small flaw. The acting is superb with the intense Francis Ng among my favorites here. The cinematography has been dissected and rightly heralded by critics. Since it carries many To's trademarks it helps to view this film more than once or at least pay strict attention while watching it. Plot points are alluded to and rarely repeated more than once. It is a challenging work and it is no wonder that this film continues to be among the [top Chinese language lists](#).

I always find cinematic connections fascinating and this film is abundant with these allusions. To has stated "I was under the influence of Akira Kurosawa when I was shooting 'The Mission.'" You can see it in To's use of the vertical wipe as well as the use of camera movement.\* Stephen Teo documents a lot of them in his monograph on Johnnie To in the book *Director in Action*. But you can also see the influence of Takashi Kitano on him as well especially in *Sonatine*. You can see this less explicitly in the torture scene (one of the most disturbing scenes in *Sonatine* to me was when the gangster was drowned by being left in the water too long, you do not get to see the result of what happens to analogous character in this film right away though another example of To's use of elliptical technique), but much more explicit on the Tsuen Wan Shopping Mall shooting scene which paralleled the laconic and Spartan

in *Sonatine* which almost looks like a Civil War standoff. The gangster malaise seen throughout this movie in common with Kitano is also familiar to fans of French auteur Jean Pierre Melville another big influence on To and John Woo.\*\* The split screen scene is most likely influenced by the split-screens used in Norman Jewison's *The Thomas Crown Affair* which also was the basis of To's 2004 film *Yesterday Once More*.

This OOP Mei Ah R1/NTSC copy is interlaced and the picture quality suffers a bit. The darks tend to be too dark. I am sure this is just a port from the laserdisc. There are three sets of subtitles: Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese and English. The English subs are pretty good. The two audio tracks are Cantonese and Mandarin with either Dolby Digital or Dolby Digital Surround 5.1. There is a trailer for the film (strangely has some scenes sped up) and one trailer for Ringo Lam's *Victim* (1999). The only other extras under the hilariously titled Data Bank are a Synopsis and Cast & Crew in both Chinese and English.

This is a movie that needs to have a good BD/DVD release of. For the States it would make a nice Criterion edition – if only Criterion treated Mainland, Taiwanese and Hong Kong films as seriously as they do Japanese. When Johnnie To did [his top 10 Criteria](#) (this is a superlative selection, make a point to see these movies if you have not already) for the company I was hoping this meant a release of one of his films but alas nothing came of it. At least the British Masters of Cinema put a release of *Mad Detective* (highly recommended; it is surprisingly R0/NTSC.) But I would love for any company to put out a remastered BD/DVD of this.

\* Akira Kurosawa loved using the vertical wipe as a transaction for small shifts in time while he would use the fade for longer periods of time. His use of excess amounts of rain in scenes is well known and influenced many Hong Kong directors. You would find countless influences in works by Johnnie To and John Woo.

\*\* I find it fascinating that all three of those directors (Woo, To and Melville) have stated that they prefer and understand directing men's character and have trouble with women's characterizations. All three also have

similarities where they deal with gangster's codes of conduct. To and Woo are both fans of musicals and have wanted to direct one.

#### Notes:

You can always find connections in To's movies to other To films besides Lam Suet. Some are more obvious than others while some are just small connections. The loss of fingers by an unpaying client by Roy reminded me of the finger gag in *The Odd One Dies*. The video game playing reminded me of *Throwdown* where there it plays a more important aspect. Anthony Wong's unusual looks is also commented in *Exiled*. The boss making coffee is a scene similar to many in To's films where food is often prepared like the robbers in *Breaking News* and Costello making the meal in *Vengeance*.

The more I watch this the more I realize that the boss Lung is controlled quite a bit by his brother. Pay attention to who makes the calls for people to be killed (of course one can make the argument that it keeps Lung's hands clean.) Also pay attention to Lung's demeanor. In history many important figures were secondary and smartly in the shadows. It makes you less likely for an assassination attempt. (by Masterofoneinchpunch of KFF)

**Mission of Condor (Hong Kong, 1990: Lee King) - aka Mission Kill** - Successful casting combinations are often repeated in HK action films. "Mission of Condor" was Nadeki's second appearance opposite Moon Lee, and the first of four with Ken Lo. Once again, Moon Lee is the central character playing a detective who breaks a major drug smuggling operation. This prompts a series of revenge killings, contracted by a gang boss played to the hilt by Simon Yam. Nadeki and Ken Lo play a pair of contract assassins. In this role Nadeki has perhaps the closest approximation to a conventionally sensual or romantic part – involving a glimpse of her bathing following an assassination then putting on a rather close fitting black dress, and brief physical intimacy with her partner Ken Lo. Otherwise, her character is all business. Clad mostly in functional pants, loose blouse or shapeless topcoat, she develops the look that would define most of her roles. Nuances, however, are suggestive. In this film her white blouse has unusual bindings on the arms – and a combat knife concealed up the sleeve. Nadeki displays some knife fighting form in this film, in addition to some more brief but excellent footwork.

After the first assassin (Eddie Ko) fails to perform a hit on the detectives (now aided by Max Mok playing an American FBI operative) and is captured, Nadeki's character is sent to finish the job. She ruthlessly knifes Ko's character to death, then fights with Moon Lee. However, her finger is cut off as punishment for apparently failing the mission. Later, after her partner is killed in a double-cross, she switches allegiance and joins an attack on the gang hideout. There she has a brief but impressive fight with Simon Yam that includes several quite remarkable jumping kicks, as well as fatalistic determination. This precedes the final confrontation between Moon Lee and Simon Yam that is the film's finale.

Structurally, there are resemblances between "Mission of Condor" and "Killer Angels." In both Moon Lee was teamed with other physically talented female partners, as well as a potential male romantic interest. Her detective team was ranged against a ruthless triad adversary who employed Nadeki and a male partner as enforcers. In both films Nadeki's character is coldly efficient but also loyal, and it is this element of loyalty that proves fatal. As with another pair of Moon Lee films that co-starred Yukari Oshima ("Dreaming the Reality," "Angel Terminators II"), the role of the female Japanese martial artist was ambiguous and ultimately sacrificial. It is intriguing to speculate on the apparent links between martial arts skills, gender, national origin and perceived role attributes in these genre films. The consistency with which these elements co-vary seems deliberate. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Mission of Justice (Hong Kong, 1992: Tony Liu)** - After opening with gratuitous soft-core intercourse, followed by the killing of the heads of a criminal gang seeking control of Thailand's drug trade, things get a little better. In an early role, Carrie Ng leads a Thai police task force and issues a lot of orders while posing in a rather striking paramilitary uniform! Moon Lee and Yukari are sent into the jungle as undercover operatives running a sting operation. Eventually they run the gang to ground, ambushing a river opium convoy amid a string of double-crosses. Although hundreds of rounds are expended throughout the movie, the gun play tends to be formulaic.

Once again Yukari is relegated to a secondary role, taking a beating on several occasions. Later in the film she appears wrung out and lacking spirit - an effect paradoxically enhanced by military camouflage clothing. As usual most of her fight scenes are grimly fought with pain and bleeding - lacking the exuberance afforded to Moon Lee. Yukari's stunt work and facial expressions are excellent, however, with better than average camera work during her

fight. She finishes one opponent with a ridge hand strike to the throat. However briefly she appears, no one else fights like her. Watch also for her physical strength as she plows ahead in the river scene at finish of the film. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Mr. Nice Guy (Hong Kong, 1997: Sammo Hung)** - Jackie ventures even further into family friendly fare with what almost feels like a watered down remake of *"Rumble in the Bronx"* with bits of *"First Strike"* thrown in for good measure. Now this would be, at least, understandable if it was another Stanley Tong collaboration, but this was directed by the one and only Sammo Hung.... and is no one's finest hour for sure.

Sammo directing Jackie has spawned classics like *"Wheels on Meals"* and *"Dragons Forever"*, fun stuff like the *"Lucky Stars"* flicks and the underrated action drama *"Heart of the Dragon"*, so you wouldn't be out of line expecting something above average here. But that is not what we get with *"Mr. Nice Guy"*. This is really Jackie at his most formulaic and uninspired. Granted, Sammo had somewhat lost his magic touch by this time, but even with that taken into consideration, this is a really disappointing effort all around. The plot is lazy, hacky tripe, which wouldn't be so bad if everything else held up, but it doesn't. It looks cheap, most of the gags feel tired and there is just little to care about overall.

Even Jackie's interminable charm and energy can't ignite this misfire. He puts upon his most bland screen persona here, that being the squeaky clean, family friendly everyman who runs from trouble, which he relied on for a good chunk of his 90's output. On top of that, he aligns himself with the usual ditzy dames and dolts played by mediocre Aussie TV actors and the likes. Though when it comes to the villains, it gets real bad. We get familiar faces like Richard Norton, Jonathan Igar and Habby Heske, who certainly hams it up, but can also hold their own. But the rest, trying to pull off mobster and gang member characters make their *"Rumble in the Bronx"* equivalents look downright scary by comparison. And as a result, the film has zero tension or sense of danger which makes you care even less.

This being a Jackie and Sammo collab, surely the action holds up? Well, it's no high watermark for either gentleman, but there is sporadic fun to be had here. Some of the many chase scenes has a few solid stunts and the construction site sequence in particular is the standout with a lot of ingenuity at play. But in terms of hard hitting fight footage there is almost none. Sammo choreographed some of Jackie's best and most iconic showdowns against the likes of Benny Urquidez and Dick Wei and here they don't even give us a big one on one with Norton for the finale. They cheat us out of that by Jackie being tied up while Norton lays into him and then close out with some big, dumb vehicular stunts reminiscent again of *"Rumble in the Bronx"*. It is overall a letdown in the action department, save for a few inspired touches of physical comedy here and there.

After this, Sammo and Jackie would never really work together again in any noteworthy capacity, and if this is all they could muster up, then maybe that's for the best. It's not that *"Mr. Nice Guy"* is any sort of blemish on either star's legacy, but it also falls far short of representing what they were capable of individually or together. In short, this is easily skipable. (by TibetanWhiteCrane of KFF)

**Mr. Vampire (Hong Kong, 1985: Ricky Lau)** - The most important film in the kyonsi (jiangshi) subgenre (hopping vampires who can suck blood through their long fingernails) of Hong Kong movies is Mr. Vampire produced by Sammo Hung's Bo Ho Films Company which would help bring out another important Hong Kong horror/comedy in *"Spooky Encounters"*. This comedic/horror is a mixture of Cantonese comedy, Taoist priests, sticky rice, chicken blood and a dash of kung fu that has become a perennial viewing of mine during the Halloween season. Its success did not go unnoticed and spawned many sequels and imitators many directed by the same director as this movie Ricky Lau Koon-Wai and starring mono eye-browed Taoist priest (fat-si) Lam Ching Ying. It also had local critical success and would be nominated for several Hong Kong awards including Best Picture (which Police Story would win), Best Director, two best supporting actors (Lam Ching Ying and Ricky Hui). It would win for Best Original Film Score.

It is said that when someone dies in anger a breath is caught in the throat. Nothing can exasperate this more than burying the body in an area with bad Feng Shui. Mr. Yam (Huang Ha: Spooky Encounters) has been having inauspicious luck since the burial of his father and has hired Master Ko (Lam Ching Ying: Prodigal Son) to help move the body to sacred ground. Every great master must have bumbling protégés and Ko has two in Man Chor (Ricky Hui: Plain Jane to the Rescue) and Chow Chun (Chin Siu-Ho: The Tai-Chi Mater). Hui (brother to Sam and Michael Hui who are also famous HK comedians) plays his role quite well and is adroit with his comedic timing (watch him in

the background in many scenes; always busy) while Chin is more of a face in this movie (though he has an extensive martial arts background). Guess who gets the romantic role in this movie?

Part of the problem of having blundering help mixed with caring for the undead is the possibility (probability) of letting a ravenous choleric blood-sucking corpse loose on the populous. Because of an improperly sealed casket, Grandpa Yam (Yuen Wah: Eastern Condors) escaped from his coffin and killed his son unbeknownst to inept police officer Wai (Billy Lau Nam-Kwong) who believes Master Ko is responsible and arrests him. However, younger Yam's corpse is slowly turning into a wandering cadaver (like father, like son) whose body is set in viewing distance of the jailed Ko. Later, Man Chor gets injured by the springy corpse's vampire-like nails while protecting Yam's daughter Ting Ting (Moon Lee Choi-Fung) and similar to the effects of European vampires bite wounds he will slowly turn into one unless prevented somehow. Meanwhile, Chow Chun is having problems of his own with a beautiful ghost named Jade (Pauline Wong) who has tricked him into falling in love with her. Some of this story does remind me of Kenji Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu* (the house of the spirit and the way Ko helps repel Jade by the characters drawn on Chow Chun), but there are many Chinese stories that have used these elements before *Ugetsu*.

If I was to nitpick about the deficiencies of this movie I would state the abrupt ending as the biggest one -- a bane of many Hong Kong films. Also, the chicken violence, which is real, might offend some (Harry Angel would like it) as well as the removal of a gallbladder from a snake -- which is also real (though after watching Shaw Brothers release *Killer Snakes* I have become numb to small amounts of slithering serpent violence). I know some might not like the broad humor associated with Cantonese comedy, but I have come to appreciate much of it.

However, there is much to appreciate from the dancing and comedic aspects of Ricky Hui to the effective use of Kung Fu and stunts. The secondary plot of the ghost love story also worked well for me. The introduction of the female ghost brought into the story was one of the most beautiful shots in the film marred only by an annoying sound effect. And like a good comedy should it finished off with a laugh. During this scene and the end credits there is a wonderful song used named Gwai San Neung "Ghost Bride" performed by the Kit Yi Chorus. The main strength of this film is that it sticks well to its premise of a comedy and does unnecessarily mix dramatic elements.

There should not be a discussion about this film without mentioning the austere pillar performance of Lam Ching Ying. This performance is analogous to Vincent Price in which a career defining *House of Wax* (1953) set forth a years of horror for Vincent Price. Both actors had years of experience in various genres before their "breakout" horror roles, both had excellent roles before (*Prodigal Son* for Lam and *Baron of Arizona* for Price) and would later have lucrative but strongly typecast roles offered to them afterwards. Lam's rendition of this Taoist priest is so perfect in its entirety (his athletic skills certainly help) that he has become a cult icon in certain circles. Like all good Taoists, he knows the value of sticky rice and its many ubiquitous powers of healing.

Along with *Spooky Encounters* this is a must watch movie from the Hong Kong comedy/horror oeuvre and perfect for introducing kyonsi to your friends -- as long as they do not like chickens (or snakes) and you have friends of course.

The Fox/Fortune Star R1 release of *Mr. Vampire* is a good basic release. There are no subtitles and the film is uncut. There is an English dub, a genuine Cantonese mono track and it is presented in a nice looking widescreen transfer. Unfortunately, like most of the Fox/Fortune Star releases you only get trailers as extras. Here is another example where the best release is the R2 Hong Kong Legends version (like so many of the Hong Kong martial art films on the Fox/Fortune releases). Though the Fox/Fortune Star R1 and Fortune Star R0 releases are the only ones I know of with the original mono (big plus for me). (by Masterofoneinchpunch of KFF)

**Mr. Vampire 2 (Hong Kong, 1986: Ricky Lau)** - Ricky Lau's horror-comedy *Mr. Vampire* is a seminal film in the uniquely Chinese "hopping vampire" genre and a Hong Kong cinema classic in its own right. Upon release in 1985, the film was a box office hit and even garnered a slew of Hong Kong Film Award nominations, including Best Picture and Best Director - if you can believe that. In light of *Mr. Vampire*'s commercial and critical success, a sequel for the following year was perhaps inevitable. It's difficult to imagine what Hong Kong audiences were expecting when *Mr. Vampire II* hit theatres in 1986, but I don't think anything could have prepared them for the film that Ricky Lau opted to make.

Rather than make a direct follow-up, Lau moves the setting from China's past to modern Hong Kong, circa 1986. Although original star Lam Ching-Ying returns and the filmmakers add Yuen Biao to the mix, they don't make their joint appearance until well into the picture. In their place, we have Chung Fat playing a college professor, who's apparently leading an archaeological dig with two of his assistants. I should point out that I'm using the term

“archaeological dig” very loosely, since – despite the professor’s academic pedigree and respectable dress – his assistants act more like grave robbers than diligent grad students. These two bumbler only seem interesting in looting the place, and in some ways, the professor does too, although he’s a bit more subtle about it.

During their excavation, they stumble upon two coffins in a cave. Inside one is the preserved body of a woman and her son, the latter dressed in a mini-Qing Dynasty robe and hat. The second coffin is empty, but they soon find two more bodies hidden behind cobwebs. The two corpses seemed to be locked in fierce combat. The first is a rotting skeleton dressed in yellow Taoist robes, while the other combatant shows no sign of decay and, like the child, is also dressed in a Qing Dynasty get-up. Is the skeleton dressed in yellow meant to be Master Kou (Lam Ching-Ying) from the original *Mr. Vampire*? The film never says and that’s not how the original ended, but the image gives the opening of *Mr. Vampire II* a real Universal/Hammer Horror feel, as if the modern-day grave robbers have discovered the Chinese Van Helsing and Dracula locked in immortal combat. It’s a promising start.

It seems all of the bodies, save for the Taoist priest, have scraps of yellow paper affixed to their foreheads. For fans of the original film, these red-inked Taoist charms will be immediately recognizable, as they are the very things stopping these corpses from springing to life. The professor and his idiot assistants don’t seem to know or care; they just see dollar signs. What they don’t realize is those Taoist charms are a dead giveaway that they aren’t dealing with ordinary corpses – they’re *kyonsi*, a whole damn family of hopping vampires. Ignorant of the enormity of their discovery, the trio takes the bodies back to their base of operations, and the charms are either accidentally or purposely removed. In the confusion that follows, an assistant named Chicken (Billy Lau) gets bitten and the child vampire escapes.

Now, up until this point in the movie, the film has devoted a great deal of screen time to these three characters. The chaos that ensues marks a good time to bring new characters into the fold. But rather than bring Yuen Biao and Lam Ching-Ying into the mix, director Ricky Lau pulls a fast one on the audience. In what is perhaps *Mr. Vampire II*’s solitary claim to fame, the kid vampire wanders into suburbia and befriends a chubby little girl, commencing a subplot strongly reminiscent of *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*.

Initially believing the vampire to be an illegal immigrant from mainland China, the little girl introduces her newfound friend to her chubbier older brother. What commences hence is so god-awful and ridiculous that it has to be seen to be believed. The siblings introduce their vampire pal to their friends, and they all decide to spend a day out on the town. The children slap a headscarf on the vampire (to protect him from the sun!), name him “OK Boy,” and take him to the park to ride see-saws, play on the slide, and engage in all sort of precocious, wacky behavior. That’s right – it’s cheesy montage time. Exactly how all these kids were able to run around metropolitan Hong Kong by themselves is an issue the film discreetly sidesteps.

While watching these events unfold, I couldn’t help but think of the excellent Swedish film, *Let the Right One In* which explores the relationship between a young boy and a “child” vampire to great dramatic effect. To be clear, *Mr. Vampire II* is not that kind of movie. Heck, this isn’t even *Twilight*. For whatever reason, “OK Boy” doesn’t snack on his new friends, although he does, quite disturbingly, cheerfully raid a blood bank during the all-too-cheerful montage sequence.

Meanwhile, Chicken seeks treatment for his nasty wound and meets a Chinese physician (Lam Ching-Ying finally!). The man knows a vampire bite when he sees one, despite Chicken’s protestations to the contrary. After treating Chicken’s wound, the doc decides to tail the professor’s hapless assistant and find out where the vampire nest is. Backing him up are his daughter Gigi (Moon Lee) and her boyfriend, a reporter named Jen (Yuen Biao). Eventually, all the characters from these separate factions – the professor’s people, the kids, and the medicine shop group – end up crossing paths as the vampires run wild on Hong Kong, and all hell breaks loose – with goofy results.

It would be easy to dismiss *Mr. Vampire II* as yet another crappy sequel, but the film does have its charms. Is it scary? No, but what Chinese vampire films are? The *Mr. Vampire* movies are for people who like to see horrific situations, but don’t really want to be scared, and for the most part, this movie delivers that experience. *Mr. Vampire II* has its tongue placed firmly in its cheek. After all, this is a movie that not only has Lam Ching-Ying momentarily don his familiar Taoist robe just to reference the first film, but actually has him break the fourth wall. Although he doesn’t directly address the audience, he does draw attention to the fact that he knows he’s in a film. When asked by a panicked cop (James Tien) what qualifies him to intervene in this dangerous vampire business, Lam Ching-Ying proceeds to name-drop his “mentor” Sammo Hung, their experiences in *Encounters of the Spooky Kind* (1980) and *The Dead and the Deadly* (1983), and his own appearance “last year” in the original *Mr. Vampire*! The real capper is when he reveals his name as “Lam Ching-Ying.” The cops have no idea who that is or why they should be impressed.



Although it's a shame that Yuen Biao isn't given more to do, one standout scene involves his character's accidental reawakening of the vampire couple when he breaks into the professor's hideout. He sees two bottles labeled "retarder" (I'm not kidding), and in the ensuing melee, the vials shatter, causing everyone, including the vampires, to move and talk in slow-motion - and not by over-cranking the camera. Instead, the actors just move and talk reeeally slowly, just like a group of friends might do when they're pretending to do something in slow-motion. It's a silly scene that's admittedly hit-or-miss, but for me, it worked pretty well.

Curiously enough, what many critics deride as the worst part of the film - the kiddie vampire segment - is probably the principal reason to watch the movie. It's so over-the-top that it begs at least one viewing by any Hong Kong cinema fan worth his/her salt. And believe it or not, this tangential section of the film actually tries to comment, albeit quite weakly, on specific social issues in the contemporary culture. In a thread that is never followed up on, the kids are shown to be jealous of their father's potential love interest, a woman who never appears, remaining solely a voice on the phone. And at one point, the father of the two young children is washing the dishes with his son, and they proceed to talk about single parenting and mixed-up gender roles in a surprisingly funny interchange.

But perhaps the most interesting social issue that the film tries to tackle is the question of what to do with illegal immigrants from China. I'm assuming the TV report that the children watch involving this topic is meant to be a "ripped from the headlines" reference, and one can't help but wonder exactly what the symbolism of two chubby, overindulged, and undisciplined Hong Kong brats befriending a benevolent bloodsucker who is coded as a Mainlander is supposed to mean. In truth, it probably wasn't thought out enough to mean a damn thing, but the reference sure seems like a stab at some kind of relevancy in what was meant to be an otherwise cheap, disposable thrill - a comic vampire sequel.

Despite singling out certain elements that I enjoyed, I will admit that *Mr. Vampire II* is by no means as good as the original. To be honest, it probably isn't even "good." But what it does have going for it is something I can only call "the Hong Kong spirit." That is to say, while staying within the parameters of what constitutes a sequel, Ricky Lau and company make all kinds of interesting, if somewhat bizarre decisions with the plot and characters of *Mr. Vampire II*, and in many ways, it's that kind of devil-may-care wackiness - that feeling that absolutely anything could happen - that got a lot of Western viewers hooked on Hong Kong cinema in the first place. And while *Mr. Vampire II* isn't high art, it is a time capsule of sorts, not only in terms of the historical era it represents, but as the adventurous filmmaking spirit of that era - one which has, alas, long since passed on to the other side. (by Calvin McMillin of LoveHKfilm)

**Mr. Vampire 3 (Hong Kong, 1987: Ricky Lau)** - After a foray into modern times for *Mr. Vampire II*, the filmmakers behind *Mr. Vampire III* decided to take a more "back-to-basics" approach, as the main action of this installment returns to the original's Qing dynasty setting. This time, the plot centers on Uncle Ming (Richard Ng), a Taoist priest who roams from town to town as a kind of ghostbusting vagabond.

Predating Peter Jackson's *The Frighteners* by about nine years, *Mr. Vampire III* bears a strikingly similar premise. It seems that Ming has the ability to see and talk to dead people, and in the process, he's befriended two friendly ghosts, the adult Ta Pao (Lui Fong) and the much younger kiddie ghost, Hsi Pao. The three of them strike up a deal - the ghosts will haunt some houses, and Ming will show up to collect the reward for "exorcising" the spirits. However, it turns out that the happy trio's seemingly perfect con possesses an expiration date.

The film begins with the group's disastrous attempt to spook some people who happen to be living in an *already* haunted house. When the malevolent ghosts forcibly eject Ming and his supernatural buddies from the rustic household, the three of them hit the road once more. But their aimless wanderings lead them directly into a sleepy little village that's currently under siege by a group of dangerous, bloodthirsty bandits. But these aren't your run-of-the-mill bandits - these folks are sorcerers, too. Clearly, the villagers have their hands full.

Once inside the city limits, Ming meets and befriends the One-Eyebrow Priest (Lam Ching-Ying, who dons the yellow Taoist robes for all of five seconds) and his moronic second-in-command, Captain Chiang (Billy Lau). An all-out battle with the invading hordes proves successful for the villagers, and the conquering heroes return home. But Ming's overprotective ghost pals catch the attention of the disapproving One-Eyebrow Priest. Although Ming's good-natured tolerance of his ghostly pals raises a few eyebrows (so to speak) among his newfound mortal pals, the Priest's attention quickly turns away from debating the civil rights of "the living impaired" to a much more important threat. Although seemingly vanquished, a female sorceress survived the battle and has plans to resurrect her dead brethren to exact unholy revenge. Yikes.

*Mr. Vampire III* works best as an assemblage of amusing set pieces and sight gags. Ta Pao and Hsi Pao's invisible manipulation of Captain Chiang's body is one such example. Another is the One-Eyebrow Priest's ability to fold up the ghost child as if he were nothing more than a human-sized piece of origami! Perhaps the film's best gag involves a scene in which a naked Richard Ng is covered in black soot in order to hide himself from a muck-encrusted supernatural predator. And lest I forget, there's also a guy in a giant bird suit chasing Richard Ng around during the finale. But as fun, inventive or just plain silly as these scenes are, they're just disparate scenes that don't necessarily add up to some larger whole.

One issue that's raised but then remains somewhat unexplored involves the ethics of vanquishing ghosts at all. For Captain Chiang, all ghosts are evil and should be destroyed, although he's a bit prejudiced, considering that he was humiliated by Ta Pao and Hsi Pao for an earlier transgression. The One-Eyebrow Priest seems to think that ghosts should be trapped – he's got an entire cabinet full of spirits sealed in containers – but doesn't seem in too much of a hurry to send them to the next world. And Ming thinks it's okay to hang around ghosts (and make a little money off them) since they're not hurting anyone. Of course, it's also important to recognize that these two bumbling ghosts seem to be Ming's only friends in the world.

And what about those ghosts? They seem to enjoy sticking around in the mortal plane, even though prior *Mr. Vampire* films suggest that they'd be better served by being reincarnated. This is probably too philosophically-heavy a topic for a silly vampire comedy, but it's still an interesting train of thought to pursue.

In any event, *Mr. Vampire III* is little more than silly fun, paling in comparison to the original film. Of course, I would be remiss if I didn't point out the film's most egregious violation of the franchise -- there aren't any vampires! Still, if you're a fan of these movies or Chinese horror comedies in general, you could do a lot worse than *Mr. Vampire III* (by Calvin McMillin of LoveHKfilm)

**Mr. Vampire Saga IV (Hong Kong, 1988: Ricky Lau)** - After 'Mr. Vampire 3' saw a return to form for the series, it was a surprise to see the next instalment arrive without the charismatic Lam Ching Ying. Instead, we have Anthony Chan as the grumpy Taoist Priest (reprising his cameo role from the original), with Wu Ma as his feuding Monk neighbour!

Initially, the first half of the film is predominantly focussed on developing the rivalry between Ma and Chan's characters and introducing us to their sidekicks: the lovely Rachel Lee and the acrobatic Chin Kar Lok. Much of this character development is done through some pretty effective comedic set pieces that occasionally had me laughing out loud, which is pretty rare for such unsubtle humour! At around the halfway mark, the story changes somewhat and sees the arrival of a royal transport carrying a gold coffin, and predictably, its contents escape and much carnage ensues.

The *Mr. Vampire* series is not known for being action packed, but this certainly contains its fair share of bone-crunching moments. Chin Kar Lok steals the show with some excellent acrobatics, falls and kicks leaving Wu Ma and Anthony Chan to show off the typical Taoist techniques seen in all similar genre flicks. It was nice to see a few of Sammo Hung's stunt troupe such as Yuen Wah and Chung Fa get some meatier roles, although Wah is not used for his fighting skills. Instead, he camps it up to the extreme providing another memorable character to add to his diverse list.

Overall, this is possibly the second best of the true *Mr. Vampire* films and is a worthy purchase for all HK Horror fans. As expected, it is still lacking when compared to the overall polish of the original, and it would have been nice to have Lam Ching Ying on board. Nevertheless, this is still good fun, and provides everything one could ask for from a film of this genre. (by Tony Ryan of Far East Films)

**Mr. Vampire 1992 (Hong Kong, 1992: Ricky Lau)** - Two years on from the last sequel, director Ricky Lau returns to the hopping vampire franchise reuniting the cast of the original *Mr. Vampire* (1985). According to Chinese folklore the spirits of unborn or aborted babies return to Earth as vengeful, so-called Holy Ghosts. Taoist master Lam Ching Ying (by now so associated with his ghost-busting role, his character bears his name) and his bumbling assistants, Chou (Chin Siu Ho) and Man Choi (Ricky Hui) contain these errant sprites in handy clay Buddhas. Chaos ensues when our halfwit heroes revive the little ghosts as part of a get-rich-quick scheme, only for the moppets to magically fling them around the room and - somewhat disturbingly, given they are kids after all - twang Chou's penis like an elastic band! Meanwhile, Master Lam is intent on eluding Birdie (Sandra Ng), a feisty female exorcist with a hopeless crush on the stern sifu. Birdie plies her trade helping folks with ghostly troubles, as when a local man feigns demonic possession to get out of telling his wife he spent last night in a brothel.

After some episodic comic antics an actual plot surfaces when comely maiden Nian Ying (Nicole Tam Hoi-Yan) arrives setting the boys hearts a-flutter and bringing Master Lam news of Michelin (Suki Kwan Sau-Mei), a former flame now married to a bumptuous Japanese general (Billy Lau) and expecting their first child. Hired to investigate her troubled pregnancy, Lam and co. discover Michelin's nursemaid (Tsui Man-Wah) is really an emissary for a Holy Ghost intent on using her baby as a vessel for its evil soul.

By the early Nineties Lam Ching Ying had made so many hopping vampire movies even this official entry in the Mr. Vampire series was almost indistinguishable from its imitators. Unlike the earlier films this was an independent production from Teddy Yip Wing Cho - who cameos as a sushi chef - rather than Sammo Hung, the original brain behind the series. Ricky Lau recycles motifs from several earlier entries, making this something akin to the franchise's own greatest hits tribute except Hung's absence is felt in action scenes that are efficient rather than spectacular while the special effects are more modest than before. A painterly sequence wherein Birdie and Nian Ying, sandwiched between rival ghost armies in flowing white and vibrant red, fight their way out zapping cartoon energy beams is a visual standout, while a scene in which Chou and Man Choi infiltrate a vampire coven disguised as bloodsuckers is especially amusing.

Elastic-faced comedienne Sandra Ng injects some manic energy, playing nicely off the reserved Lam Ching Ying, however the humour is noticeably cruder than before. In place of the original's inspired slapstick fu, an abundance of childish toilet humour, vomit and sex gags betray the influence of the new box office kings of lowbrow comedy: Wong Jing and Stephen Chow Sing Chi. Having said that, the vampire battle where our diarrhea-ridden heroes need constant toilet breaks is funny in an admittedly puerile sort of way. The turn-of-the-century setting allows for some laughs at the expense of the Japanese colonial rulers, with Billy Chow again essaying his stock role as posturing comedy scumbag, but with added subtextual weight given he has not only stolen the hero's girlfriend but his homeland.

Unlike *Fist of Fury* (1971) however the film lets the invader off the hook. Curiously, while the general repeatedly threatens to shoot our heroes and cheats on his wife with the ghostly nursemaid but still gets the girl. Meanwhile poor Lam is forced to marry shrewish Birdie in order to save the love of his life then watch as she slips away. The film also glosses over a poignant moment when lovelorn Man Choi selflessly shields Nian Ying with his body though she scarcely notices and the mild love triangle more or less evaporates. Ricky Lau's frenetic camerawork keeps things bubbling nicely but none of the emotional conflicts raised by the plot are properly resolved, leaving this the least substantial entry in the series. (by Andrew Pragasm of The Spinning Image)

**Mountain Warriors (Hong Kong, 1992: Lin Wen-Wei)** - Following the arrest of Noriega, a rogue general (Eddie Ko Hung) in the Golden Triangle has been sending terrorists to kill foreign diplomats as retaliation for having lost an important distributor. The American government sends an old general who served in 'Nam to round up some mercenaries (led by Waise Lee) and take the general out. Thomas Weisser's *Asian Cult Cinema* rated this \*\*\*/\*\*\*\*, as opposed to \*1/2 (out of \*\*\*\*) for *Cheetah on Fire*, which I can't understand why. This movie takes a good 40 minutes for the characters to make it into the jungles of the Golden Triangle, and even then, the gunplay is surprisingly low octane. There are a handful of brief martial arts scuffles, and while Tsui Fat choreographs them with the appropriate amount of energy, it's clear that he's working with a number of non-martial artists. He did far better work in *Cheetah on Fire* than here. While the white guy is the leader of the mission, and Waise Lee is the leader of the mercenaries, most of the heavy lifting in the action falls to a cripple named Black Horse (Roger Kwok). Carrie Ng shows up as Waise Lee's girlfriend, the proprietess of a strip club. The movie drags heavily whenever bullets aren't being fired, and much of the melodrama in the first half threatens to kill the film dead. This should've been a low-budget *Apocalypse Now*, but in the end it's just forgettable. (by Blake Matthews)

**Murders Made to Order (Hong Kong, 1993: Lee Kwok-Lap)** - Though this sequel to *Sting of the Scorpion* has the characteristics of a hurried and slapdash production, it still contains an intriguing story and a dark gritty atmosphere. Unlike *Sting of the Scorpion* that did not really focus on Maggie Siu's character until the second half of the film, Maggie carries this one from beginning to end. Her quietly serious and driven performance is certainly the best thing about the film. Some sloppy plotting, scenes that feel incomplete, lapses in logic and the large usage of film scenes from *Sting of the Scorpion* evidence the low production values of this movie.

In a *Black Cat* like prologue Cynthia Khan is given a gun in a restaurant and instructed by Waise Lee to assassinate her target and escape through the kitchen. When Cynthia tries to escape though, she finds her way blocked and her employers trying to kill her. She is barely able to escape. This oddly is the last we see of Cynthia in the film. Taking place two years after the *Sting of the Scorpion* came to a dramatic finish, ex-policewoman Maggie is imprisoned in an insane asylum. The police realize that Waise runs an assassination agency and they release Maggie to go undercover and infiltrate the "killing for hire" group.

Upon her release, Maggie discovers that her childhood friend and then betrayer, Inspector Cheng, is still alive and is responsible for her assignment. Faced with the choice of going back into the asylum or carrying out her orders, Maggie descends into the sleazy world of hostess girls and drug addiction in order to get close to Waise. She gets to show her toughness on a few occasions – a knife through the hand, a bottle over the head – and then she puts a plank full of nails through a guy's skull – an undercover cop. She goes into hiding (though it is in fact her house from the previous film) and Waise thinks he has a perfect killing machine on his hands.

The action doesn't really get going until the second half and then is at most only barely competent, but the context of the action scenes make them enjoyable to some extent. The film lacks some of the emotional bite of the first film, but viewing the continuing adventures of Maggie has an almost voyeuristic feel to it – from being betrayed by her friend, losing her boyfriend, becoming a killer, losing her mind, becoming an addict to final redemption. It makes me wish that there were further films made of this character. It is somewhat surprising that Maggie didn't become a larger film star – she provides a terrifically understated but intense performance – and she is certainly attractive – but instead she found her fame in the world of TV. Appearing also as Maggie's friend is Chan Kwok-bong. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Musical Vampire (Hong Kong, 1992: Wilson Tong)** - It was previously considered that the formula Lam Ching Ying + Vampires was a foolproof formula for movie success. And you'd think that taking Wilson Tong as director and sprinkling in a little bit of Loletta Lee and Hung Yan Yan could only improve things... but Musical Vampire proves us all wrong. Fundamentally this is because of 3 or 4 basic mistakes:

1. Lam Ching Ying is only in the movie for about 15 minutes (these being by far the best 15 minutes, incidentally). Samuel Fung is a very nice chap, I'm sure, but simply doesn't have the degree of awesomeness that Lam Ching Ying has.

2. The hero is some annoying dipstick of a man, who is quite devoid of charisma. Scenes that are meant to be amusing are instead annoying. The very young looking and not-bald Hung Yan Yan should have had much more screen time (HYY does kick ass when he gets the chance too)

3. The biggest, most fatal one... they utterly betrayed the whole gyonsi concept by trying to give the vampire a personality! The vampire becomes a menace after his corpse is stolen, and some mad gweilo scientist decides to inject stimulants into its brain for 'research'. Minutes later, the corpse has sprouted pointy canines and is tearing out the throat of the scientist and all around.

Now we know that the scientist's meddling has made this gyonsi somewhat different to the usual - sucking blood and being completely immune to the usual Taoist techniques for instance. But did they really have to make him run around waving his arms at people and snarling like a mad dog? It totally destroys the gravitas, the sense of the mysterious and alien undead that the gyonsi usually manage to carry (even whilst hopping in comedy fashion). Add to this the fact that he has far too many facial expressions and likes to sniff people, and you're looking at something more like an animal than a fiend from the grave...

...and then it speaks.

4. The vampire speaks. What were they thinking? It doesn't speak in grave tones of doom like Christopher Lee, but in some kind of feral whining language that only Lam Ching Ying can understand. I swear they mixed up the concept of 'vampire' and 'dog'. So sad, so sad, so sad

The only worthwhile bits are when Lam Ching Ying turns up as the bad-assed Taoist vampire buster we know and love, only to discover that this particular vampire is immune to everything he throws at it. Only the sound of music pacifies him. To be honest, I forget how they finally vanquish him in the end... I think I may have already fallen asleep by the time it happened. (by MrBooth of HKMDB)

**My Father is a Hero (Hong Kong, 1995: Corey Yuen)** – aka *Jet Li's The Enforcer* - First off, I pop in the DVD. Good news: The movie is letterboxed. Essential, really; you can't clip off part of the image in a movie where the characters are leaping all over the screen. Bad news: It's dubbed into English. The dubbing isn't absolutely farcical, but really, it's a DVD, so there's no reason not to provide the Chinese language track(s). That's especially true in this case, as they had already decided to provide English subtitles.

I was also disappointed to see that the film was set in contemporary times. Sure enough, this meant it was yet another 'undercover cop amongst super-violent criminals' movie. I think I was spoiled by seeing Jet Li's historicals

first, including the *Once Upon a Time in China* movies, and particularly his superlative *Fist of Legend*, which is probably my favorite martial arts movie. I just don't enjoy the present-day stuff nearly as much.

Jet Li is Kung Wei, a cop deep undercover in one of the Chinese provinces. He's so undercover that even his sickly wife and 10-year-old son, Johnny, don't know he's a cop. Of course, his dual life always keeps him from being there for his son, a budding champion Kung Fu master.

Wei's boss sends him to Hong Kong to break up an ultra-violent gang led by the, shall we say, flamboyantly eeee-vil Bo. Wei is upset by this news, because his wife is becoming increasingly ill. The only thing that helps her even temporarily at this point is ant soup, which is exactly what it sounds like. There are several scenes of young Johnny dutifully collecting ants for this. Ick.

Needless to say, Wei does take the assignment. To establish his cover, he is arrested and a breakout is arranged, during which G-Dog, a member of Bo's gang, is sprung as well. (In the film's most shocking moment, Wei matter of factly kills a couple of guard dogs with his kung fu. I can't imagine that scene in an American film.)

G-Dog is the dumb guy who proves too goodhearted to follow Bo's lead for long. Bo, meanwhile, is one of those guys who double crosses and murders everyone who makes deals with him, which makes you wonder why anyone would continue to do so.

Wei participates in a violent gang rubout/robbery in a fashionable eatery. During this he kills several rival gang members. This is a staple of Chinese cop movies, and man, I guess police officers over there have a lot more leeway than the one's here. However, on the scene is supercop Inspector Anna Fong. She offers herself as a hostage for Wei so as to protect the bystanders. When the moment presents itself, she tries to capture Wei, but nearly falls to her death in doing so. Wei saves her before escaping, much to her confusion. It's that kind of characterization, in which crooks shouldn't save cops, as if they were members of rival sports teams.

Anna tracks Wei's identity down, and heads to his home province to gather more information on him. His secretive police boss claims no knowledge of him (typical bad movie plotting), so Anna goes to his home and presents herself as Wei's colleague. There she begins to suspect that Wei is more than a common criminal, apparently just because his wife is nice and she likes his kid. Well, the wife kicks off, and because they've become close friends over the last, I don't know, two days to two weeks, Anna tearfully agrees to become Johnny's guardian. (!!)

This is the kind of movie logic where it's OK for a beloved mother and wife to die, because Anna's on hand to become an eventual replacement for her.

I don't know, there's some good stuff here, and it's certainly not a disaster by any means, but it's not that great, either. Structurally, the script relies much too heavily on contrivances and coincidence. As well, there's waaaay too much character stuff. This isn't all necessarily horrible in itself, but it often has you wishing they'd just get on with it, especially true in the middle of the picture.

Even with the characterization, moreover, there are several problematic areas. Johnny seems pretty emotionally untouched by all these events, including seeing his mom and an adoptive uncle die, and thinking his father is a criminal. All's well that ends well, though, and like I said, things end with Anna ready to replace the wife, like a modular unit. Her sudden willingness to more act as Johnny's guardian, meanwhile, is literally comical.

I did like the fact that Johnny has this one very good young friend. At one point, the other mean kids try to stone Johnny (!), but his buddy jumps in front of him and takes the blows. However, their relationship doesn't go anywhere, and ends on an abrupt sad note when Anna takes Johnny to Hong Kong with her.

G-Dog's shift from good guy to bad guy a little too easily. This only works because he's a 'type,' and we expect him to do so. The characterization, in other words, is very simplistic, like that of Hollywood movies of the '30s.

The film's most off-kilter element, meanwhile, is Bo. He's played so cartoonishly broad that he knocks the film off-balance whenever he's onscreen. Considering how straight-facedly 'dramatic' the rest of the picture tries to be, with constant pathos and stuff, his antics were all the more bizarre. The rest of the gang members, meanwhile, are just faceless goons.

Another problem is the rote manner in which Wei's boss sends his undercover agent to Hong Kong, to participate in several spectacular crimes and shoot-outs, without bothering to alert the local police to his presence. What if Wei were shot by the cops during one of these jobs? That's dumb enough, but when Anna shows up looking for information, he still maintains his ignorance. Wouldn't it be better to bring her in, lest she screw up Wei's assignment?

The action scenes, as directed by veteran helmer Corey Yeun, are often choppy shot and edited. There [are] some good set pieces here, but only in one did Li get to go all out. Several others, I felt, seemed oddly truncated. I don't know, I want insane madness and constant action when I watch these Hong Kong movies.

Actually, young Johnny has the best of the action stuff, including a hilarious bit where Wei swings him around on the end of a rope and Johnny Kung Fu a bunch of dudes. Even so, there's something disquieting about seeing a dad and a cop allowing a ten year-old to fight beside them in deadly battles, not to mention seeing grown men try to cut a kid down with cleavers, even if he is an ass kicker.

Meanwhile, Anna gets to show her (literal) chops as well. She's played by singer/actress Anita Mui, who according to the IMDb is known as the "Madonna of Hong Kong". Ms. Mui appeared in more placid roles in some Jackie Chan movies, including *Rumble in the Bronx* and *Drunken Master II*. Here she's allowed to strut her own martial arts stuff, and acquits herself nicely. Tragically, Ms. Mui died of cancer in 2003, at the age of forty.

Still, I found it weird that Li was only sporadically given the opportunity to strut his stuff. It's like going to see a Gene Kelly musical where most of the dancing is done by other people. The balance between Kung Fu and Gun Fu was also off, I thought. When you have an amazing acrobatic talent like Li, having him shoot people, even in amazing ways, seems a bit strange. By the end they need an obvious contrivance for why all the guys he fights aren't armed, but since that's what we want, we go with it.

Tech credits are often rough. The stunt work, as you'd expect, is incredible (although a scene with Anna jumping through the window of a moving truck isn't nearly pulled off), and the occasional use of wirework, as when Wei swings his son around, is obvious but enjoyable. However, the production obviously suffered from some budgetary constraints, and basic things like the lighting are often a bit lacking.

You can see why these Hong Kong stars dream of coming to Hollywood to make movies. They certainly are slicker. However, our studios still obviously don't have a clue what to do with guys like Li or Jackie Chan. The Enforcer might be a far cry from something like *Fist of Legend*, but it's still a lot better than generic lame actioners like *Romeo Must Die* or *Cradle 2 the Grave*. Fans should keep an eye out, meanwhile, for *Hero*, a historical which Li returned to Hong Kong to make in 2002. It's due for a limited art house run here in the states sometime soon.

By the way, and I kid you not, here is the IMDb plot description for his next, American movie:

#### *Danny the Dog (2005)*

This is the story of Danny (Jet Li), a slave who has lived his whole life without any sort of normal human education, with the mind and personality of a young child, with only one lesson learned: how to fight. Treated like a dog by his owner/boss, Bart (Bob Hoskins) which includes having to wear a collar, Danny has been raised to be a lethal fighting machine who fights in illegal gladiator-style fight clubs, where he earns lots of money for Bart as the undisputed champion. After a car accident that lands Bart in a coma, however, Danny meets a kind elderly blind piano tuner (Morgan Freeman) on the run because he knows secrets some bad guys don't want known, who uses music to teach Danny some things about the world and about being human..."

I can't believe they're ripping off the friggin' *The Bride of Frankenstein* here. It's like the martial arts version of one of those awful 'humanism' movies Robin Williams keeps inflicting on us. Good grief, this guy only has so many more pictures in him. Somebody help him!! (by Ken Begg of Jabootu)

**My Flying Wife (Hong Kong, 1991: O Sing-Pui)** - I just recently watched *My Flying Wife* (1991) starring Sammo Hung and it acts as an unofficial companion piece to his *Close Encounters of the Spooky Kind* movies or *The Dead and the Deadly*. This effort was just as enjoyable as the former and better than the latter.

Sammo is a car dealer and triad boss who finds himself ensnared in a power struggle to save one of his stooges (Terrance Fok) from the ire of a female ghost (Lu Yi) and her child trying to reincarnate by taking a pearl of reincarnation that can be plucked from a human corpse after they die. They targeted his stooge (Who has the ability to see ghosts) in the first place because he intervened by preventing a young woman (Fennie Yuen) from committing suicide because she was in debt with loan sharks. So being robbed of the chance to get the pearl from the woman they now are focused on getting his even if they have to deliberately cause his death in the process.

Without revealing any more to the plot because there is of course more to this story, This romp is an enjoyable one rife with laugh out loud moments and of course an infusion of kung-fu. Not to the extent of *Close Encounters of the Spooky Kind* but enough to get you by. This movie also has appearances by Roy Cheung Yiu Yeung as a triad

ghost, Shing Fui On as an administrator ghost in the spirit realm and Tommy Wong Kwong Leung in an unforgettable performance as a blind Taoist/fortune teller.

This movie can be found on YouTube if you can't find your own to purchase but either way it's one of those movies you have to see at least once in your life. Especially if you're a Sammo admirer like yours truly. (by Kokuryuha of KFF)

**My Heart is that Eternal Rose (Hong Kong, 1989: Patrick Tam)** - This film just drips with fatalism, romanticism and melodrama. The music, the lighting and cinematography all add to this atmosphere. It is somewhat emotionally manipulative, but the last thirty minutes of the film are gripping and inevitable.

Joey Wong and her ex-triad father run a beach bar and life seems good. But destiny is dealing them another hand. The father's old triad boss calls in a hit and the father, Joey's boyfriend (Kenny Bee) and Ng Man Tat go into China to smuggle the boss's son into HK. Things go very wrong. Kenny Bee goes to the Philippines to hide and Joey has to become the mistress of Godfather Chen to save her father.

Six years later, Kenny returns. He has spent his time well, as he is now a very proficient hired killer. That skill will come in handy very soon. As fate would have it he runs into Joey. Like an eternal rose, love has not faded. Tony Leung Chiu - Wai is the friendly and honorable bodyguard to Joey. She had asked him earlier if he would ever help her escape from the clutches of Chen, he responds that he doesn't know. He soon has to make that choice.

This is a pretty good if somewhat predictable film. There are some very bloody shootouts and an excellent performance from Tony Leung. If he had played Bee's role, I think this film might have been even better. Bee who I loved so much in Shanghai Blues strikes me as a bit stiff here and Tony could have done so much more with that role.

Chris Doyle does the cinematography duties here. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**My Hero (Hong Kong, 1990: Leung Kar-Yan)** - This film comes fairly early in the career of Stephen Chow and even though he is the main actor here, I have to assume that he didn't have a lot of input into the story. That's because there is very little humor as the focus is more dramatic and action oriented. It's a bit of a peculiar mix though because Chow often acts like he is in a comedy – but nothing very funny is going on around him. In fact, it is a fairly brutal triad film at times.

Chow is a busboy in a nightclub and one evening there is an attempted assassination on a triad boss. Chow warns him in time and the boss escapes with the help of his right hand man – Wilson Lam – who reminds Chow of a manga hero. Chow gives up the exciting life of busboying and joins the triad. His first assignment is to help get revenge on the triad boss behind the assassination attempt.

Chow works his way up the triad ladder of success and becomes good friends with Lam and Shing Fui-On. The three of them are like the three musketeers. Along for the ride is a "flower vase" role for Ann Bridgewater – though from the out takes it appears that much of her role was cut out.

This is just a film that can't make up its mind what it wants to be. There are a few decent action scenes – one in particular that I enjoyed was an attack from a bunch of long tailed boats in Thailand – and there are a few funny moments, but the movie is fairly unsatisfying over all.

The portrayal of triad life also feels plain idiotic – they are just good fun folks who have certain special skills. Shing Fui-On is a great family man with eight daughters. But the silliest moment was a pop like musical video scene in which Chow's gang is slaughtering a rival gang. Think "Raindrops keep falling on my Head" being played over the final scene in *The Wild Bunch*. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**My Lucky Stars (Hong Kong, 1985: Sammo Hung)** - Two Hong-Kong cops are sent to Tokyo to catch an ex-cop who stole a large amount of money in diamonds. After one is captured by the Ninja-gang protecting the rogue cop, the other one gets his old Orphanage gang, dubbed the "Five Lucky Stars," to help him. They don't like this much, but they do it.

I'm gonna go outright and say this: The whole 3 stars out of 5 I gave this movie go to the action/fight sequences, which are terrific. Typical Jackie Chan/Sammo Hung stuff, excellent.

What the hell was the rest though? When this movie isn't an undercover cop thriller, it becomes an outright mess, and I say that as someone who kinda likes the goofier Hong Kong comedy stuff.

I know this is a movie from another time and culture but Sammo Hung's crew are so unlikable and despicable that I just don't see how I could ever root for them? They're rapey, selfish thieves who have no sense of honor and would throw their friend in front of danger in a heartbeat if it benefited them.

Now I admit that some of the scenes were funny but most of them were bad, and not in the "so bad it's good" category I'm afraid. More like in the "what the hell am I watching?" kinda way.

It's a shame because I liked the same 5 lucky stars dynamics in *Winners and Sinners* somewhat, I just thought it didn't work at all in this movie. In the first one they're mostly goofy, now they're something else. Malicious or something, and it didn't work for me at all.

Now as for the fights... well this is another story altogether!

The beginning sequence starts with a bang and is lovely, I love watching Yuen Biao performing athletic feats, he's as good as Jackie Chan and so impressive. And Jackie is his usual self here.

The ending fight sequence is insane.

Love the presence of Dick Wei as well, a great fighter who has a few high-kick up his sleeves. Glass breaks. Kicks fly around. Kung Fu inside a house of horrors! 2 kick-ass chicks fight each other. Sammo gets under-estimated as usual then wipes the floors with everyone. Fighting in the snow.

Lovely!

Stunts - 90/100 | Typical Jackie/Sammo stuff. A-grade.

Narrative - 45/100 | Terrible! It's like this movie wants to be 2 things at the same time. Also, poor Sibelle Hu, the cringe induced from this movie must have shattered all her teeth right off.

Choreography - 91/100 | Multiple people shine, not much to say except that it's excellent.

Enjoyment - 60/100 | All because of the action scenes and select few comedic scenes.

I guess I kinda recommend this movie anyway? For the action sequences, and some of the jokes do land. I mean, averaging 5/5 and 1/5 together does produce 3/5... which is what I would approximately give this movie overall. Just know what to expect. (by Daxtreme of KFF)

**Naked Killer (Hong Kong, 1992: Clarence Ford)** - My introduction to Hong Kong movies was, without a doubt, one of the best things to ever happen to me as a direct result of my writing about film. The year was 1989, and I was writing for one of the weekly arts papers here in San Francisco. I'd like to say that I was "working" for one of the weekly arts papers here in San Francisco, but the truth is that I was actually working as a clerical temp downtown, and that I was, at best, just making a meager dent in my nightly bar tab by writing a couple of film or album reviews a month for the lordly sum of a nickel a word.

Anyway, one day my editor tells me that he's pegged me as the right guy to cover a certain film festival that's coming up at one of the city's small repertory cinemas — a film festival dedicated to this crazy popular cinema that's been coming out of Hong Kong in recent years. Though I was intrigued, I have to admit that my exposure to Asian cinema at that time was limited to the output of Japan and the Bruce Lee movies I'd seen as a kid. I really didn't know what to expect. Still, what little I had heard about these films included the fact that they were extremely fast paced and filled with all kinds of crazy stunts, which, then as now, was more than enough for me. I accepted the assignment, and was in turn handed a stack of VHS tapes that had been provided by the festival organizer.

I hadn't actually planned to watch all of those tapes in one sitting. In fact, upon arriving home, popping the first of the tapes into the VCR, and witnessing its dire picture quality, I despaired at being able to get through even one of



them. Those of you who were fans of Hong Kong films during that era know exactly what I'm talking about: The Tai Seng logo, the washed out, dupey images, and just enough of the English subtitles poking up at the bottom of the screen to taunt you with their presence while at the same time remaining completely illegible.

Still, this proved to be less of an impediment to my enjoyment than I anticipated, and I was soon popping in one tape after another, devouring them greedily like a fat kid with a box of bon bons. As a result, my introduction to Hong Kong films was less of a gentle easing in than it was a process of total immersion, like learning to swim by being tossed into the deep end. In that one afternoon and evening I watched *Zu: Warriors from the Magic Mountain*, *Dragons Forever*, *Eastern Condors* and the first *Police Story*, as well as a couple others whose titles escape me at the moment. Then, on the following day, I skipped work to go to an early morning press screening that featured back-to-back showings of *A Better Tomorrow* and *A Better Tomorrow II*.

As you might imagine, to say that my mind was blown would be an epic understatement. This was a pivotal event in my life as a film fan, one that would change the way that I watched movies forever. But to understand just how blown it was, you really have to understand how different these movies were from what I, like a lot of other Americans, was used to at the time. It seems silly, thinking of it now, but previous to that time I had dedicated a lot of word count to decrying what I saw as Hollywood's then increasing reliance on action spectacle, singling out now fairly conventional films like *Lethal Weapon II* and *The Abyss* for reeling out fast paced series of big "events" at the expense of those things that thoughtful and sensitive folks such as myself were supposed to place a higher premium on, like plot and characterization.

What I had yet to realize, though, is that it wasn't that those Hollywood action films were going too far, but that they weren't going far *enough*. With Hong Kong movies, I experienced for the first time the joys of pure cinema, of movies that you experienced viscerally as a blur of motion, speed and undiluted style. This is not to say that I had previously been a stranger to the thrills of genre and exploitation cinema, mind you. Thanks to the variety of theaters available to us, my friends and I came of age as film geeks on a steady diet of equal parts art- and grind-house cinema, and back in the day were just as likely to be found at a matinee showing of *Death Race 2000* or *Don't Go In The House* at the St. Francis as we were a Bunuel retrospective at the Castro.

It's just that, in these Hong Kong films, I saw consistently demonstrated something that, in my long experience of watching American genre films, I had only very seldom seen: and that was a solid commitment to actually *delivering*. Though about as mercenary as could be, these movies paradoxically displayed a desire to entertain that seemed completely untainted by cynicism, refreshingly free of the air quotes that modern Hollywood tends to put around anything as corny as the idea of actually trying to inspire wonder in their audience, as well as of the short-cutting, bait-and-switch tactics of the exploitation game. With movies like *Eastern Condors* or *Police Story*, your mind was blown because their makers saw it as their duty to insure that your mind was blown, no matter how limited they were by their means.

Of course, who wouldn't be blown away by their first encounter with Jackie Chan in his prime? Or by the *Better Tomorrow* films, whose on-screen body count was at the time greater than anything I'd seen before — to the point of being exponentially so — yet also exuded visual poetry, along with an awful lot of not-so-subtly gay undertones? Or the, at the time, very discordant seeming collisions of ruthless violence, wacky slapstick, and overweening sentimentality found in most of these films? And then there was *Zu*, my initial reaction to which I have been striving to recreate throughout all of my subsequent years of trolling through world pop cinema. I quite honestly had never seen anything like it. So taken with it was I that I excitedly subjected the girl I was dating at the time to an impromptu screening, which she effectively shut down after twenty minutes with an indignant cry of "I can't believe you thought I would like this!" (We didn't stay together too long after that.)

So, needless to say, there were a lot more of those warbly Tai Seng videos in my future, as I spent much of the next few months trying to make up for all the time I'd spent on Earth not knowing that these movies existed. Then, in 1990, I moved to Los Angeles, and during the period of adjustment to a new town, a new job, and a new relationship, I started to lose sight of some of my old interests, including, for a time, my pursuit of crazy Hong Kong movies. This dark period, I'm sad to say, went on for far too long, finally coming to an end in the mid 90s, when an old friend, who thankfully hadn't realized how lame I'd become, gifted me with a copy of the book *Sex and Zen & A Bullet in the Head* — a book which I now know featured contributions from an upstart young film scribe by the name of Keith Allison.

It didn't take long for that book to rekindle my passion, and I was soon down at my local video store — which, like many non-chain video stores by that time, had a lovingly curated section dedicated exclusively to Hong Kong movies — trying to catch up on what I'd missed. With the *Sex and Zen* book as my guide, I chose as my first two rentals Johnny To's *The Heroic Trio* and the film that I am eventually going to get around to reviewing here, *Naked Killer*. Both films have gone on to count among my very favorites — not just in terms of Hong Kong films, but films, period. And while watching them for the first time, along with being blown away anew, I was struck by the fact that Hong

Kong films had changed while I was gone. For starters, everything was blue! And, as *Naked Killer* clearly evidenced, there was lots of sex now!

Of course, one of the biggest changes in Hong Kong cinema during my several year period of inattention was the transformation undergone by the country's "Category III" rating, which went from simply being part of the ratings code to becoming a distinct genre all its own. Essentially the Hong Kong equivalent of the U.S.'s NC17, Cat III was notable for being the one tier on the HK ratings system that was actually enforceable by law; underage audience members who flaunted it could be subjected to heavy fines. Though the rating had been around for a while, it was not until the late 80s, with the success of films like the explicit war atrocity expose *Men Behind The Sun*, that producers recognized a substantial potential audience for exactly the kind of taboos that the rating was designed to prohibit. Thus came forward a wave of films that courted the Cat III rating with depictions of almost every kind of depravity imaginable, as well as, of course, copious amounts of those age old friends of the exploitation filmmaker, nudity and simulated sex. Rape, cannibalism, sexual mutilation and graphic child murder were not uncommon in the Cat III films. And if the film happened to be directed, written, or produced by Wong Jing, it likely added to those disturbing elements a jarring dose of lowbrow slapstick comedy.

I want to say that Wong Jing is a controversial figure in Hong Kong cinema, but the truth is that there seems to be a pretty broad consensus around the fact that his films are generally awful. Or, I should say, a consensus among those who do not include the many, many, *many* filmgoers who made Jing a very wealthy man as a result of his not underestimating their appetite for trash. Jing was one of the most prolific and successful commercial filmmakers in Hong Kong, thanks to a factory-style production technique, a shrewd ability to identify and shamelessly copy popular trends, and a willingness to stoop as low as necessary to provide his audience with what he deemed their desired (very generous) level of sex, violence and vulgarity. This last quality, unsurprisingly, made him a pretty heavy presence in the Cat III scene. And while I have not exactly sought Jing's work out, I have to say that, in my experience, his name in the credits is not necessarily an impediment to a very enjoyable viewing experience. For instance, he acted as a producer on *The Seventh Curse*, which, alongside *The Eternal Evil of Asia*, is one of the most crazy and flat-out fun examples of Cat III supernatural nonsense out there. He also both produced and wrote the Clarence Ford directed thriller *Naked Killer*, which, as I've already said, is one of my favorite movies.

Now I should say here that *Naked Killer* definitely exists on the tamer end of the Cat III spectrum. In terms of sex and violence, its content doesn't go far beyond what you'd see in the kind of direct to cable erotic thrillers that Cinemax was showing at the time. But while, in the case of those thrillers, the most you could hope for, in the best of circumstances, was that they would actually deliver those promised elements, *Naked Killer* sets itself apart by being so much more than even the most unrealistic thrill seeker could hope to expect. This means that, along with our very generous apportionment of skin and gore, we also get a raft of bizarre characters, a seemingly inexhaustible series of outlandish situations, and one jaw-dropping plot twist after another, all thrown at us at the reckless, head-spinning pace that we've come to expect from Hong Kong at the top of its game. And to put the bow on the package, the whole is at once coolly stylized to within an inch of its eroticism-oozing life and as slick as a stretch of rain covered blacktop.

*Naked Killer* demonstrates its good will toward its audience by making good on its title within scant minutes of its opening credits. And by that I mean that there is a killer, and that she is indeed, by all appearances, naked. This automatically makes *Naked Killer* better than approximately 80% of all other non-porn movies with the word "naked" in the title. After an opening shot of a mysterious woman hurrying down a rain slicked street bathed in atmospheric blue light, we see an armed man making his way through a darkened apartment and surprising a woman in the shower. "What are you doing in my apartment?", he asks, effectively making our expectations do a quick somersault. Well, it turns out she's there to kill him, which she does by handily disarming him, then hobbling him with his own workout equipment before crushing his skull and sealing the deal with a well placed bullet to the groin.

We later learn that this woman is Princess (Carrie Ng), a professional assassin who, along with her partner and lesbian lover Baby (Madoka Sugawara), is responsible for a string of castration murders that have the Hong Kong police baffled. Participating in the investigation is improbably fashion-forward young police detective Tinam, played by former model Simon Yam. And, because this is a Wong Jing film, Tinam has a partner named Shithead (or "Dickhead", as he's referred to in certain, more dainty translations of the film) who we will later see mistakenly eat the severed penis of one of Princess's victims thinking that it's a sausage, as well as verbally abusing a Filipino maid with all kinds of sexually inappropriate questions. Comedy!

This being a Wong Jing film, poor Tinam is also not without a few peculiarities of his own. It seems that, ever since a recent shooting incident in which he mistakenly killed his policeman brother, he is unable to handle a gun without becoming physically ill and vomiting. He also can't get it up. In order to allay his blues, his superior officer suggests that he go get a haircut.

At the salon, Tinam witnesses a beautiful and provocatively dressed young woman named Kitty flirting with, and being aggressively hit upon by, one of the hairdressers. Things heat up when the hairdresser's pregnant girlfriend shows up demanding to know why he dumped her. Kitty at first eggs the guy on in his contemptuous treatment of the woman, but then reveals that she is in fact the woman's friend, and that she was merely setting him up in order to demonstrate to her friend what a scumbag he was. Then she takes the hairdresser's cutting shears and stabs him repeatedly in the groin with them.

Kitty is played by the actress Chingmy Yau, here saying goodbye forever to the nice girl roles that she had played previously and embarking on her career as one of HK cinema's biggest sex symbols of the 90s. Yau was the girlfriend of the married Wong Jing at the time, and the producer had — and would continue to — cast her in a number of his films, including, in the wake of *Naked Killer's* success, quite a few Cat III titles. Intimations of the casting couch aside, it's easy to see why this was. Yau is a star with enormous sex appeal, and, in *Naked Killer* the camera just can't get enough of her. Cinematographer William Yim takes great care to insure that no opportunity is missed to milk the beautiful star's every pose and gesture for all of its fetishistic potential, whether she be zipping herself in or out of some picturesquely restricting pleather or spandex garment, or suggestively wielding an automatic weapon.

Interestingly, despite her status as a star of erotic films, you will never see Yau fully nude in any of her pictures — though the lengths gone to strategically place mussed sheets, picturesquely out of place strands of hair and resplendently splayed limbs to accomplish this render her “not nude” in only the most technical sense. This is a product of the general desire to avoid the stigma of nudity on the part of those actresses who appeared in Cat III films but also wanted to maintain their foothold in mainstream fare. Such career-protecting reticence is also the reason for the absurd lengths to which the actress Amy Yip went in almost every one of her films to conceal her nipples while at the same time showing us virtually all of the goods. In the case of *Naked Killer*, Japanese pinku actress Madoka Sugawara had to be imported in order to deliver the necessary quota of skin, as all of the other lead actresses keep their wardrobes within teasing yet strictly PG-13 parameters. (Note that this only holds true if you have something other than the US DVD of the movie, which has all of Sugawara's full nude scenes, among much else, edited out. So be forewarned: If you are not seeing a naked Madoka Sugawara, you have been sold an inferior product.)

After witnessing Kitty's de-balling of the hairdresser, Tinam pursues her out of the salon, only to be overcome with nausea when she grabs his gun from its holster and points it at him. Apparently fascinated by this strange and pathetic creature, Kitty uses her shrewd skills at manipulation to convince Tinam to leave the scene without arresting her, but then uses the excuse of his left-behind pager (ah, the 90s) to contact him later. With some dogged persistence on Kitty's part, a cautious, teasing courtship between the two begins, one which soon shows signs of developing into a full-blown case of *amour fou*. Before this can happen, however, Kitty comes home one day to find that her father, a humble food cart operator, has been killed by his much younger wife's lover, a Triad type by the name of Bee. Kitty responds to this by showing up at Bee's offices with a sub-machinegun and killing absolutely everyone in sight — receptionists, secretaries, file clerks, everyone — before finally doing in the man himself. With some of Bee's goons in pursuit, she then takes as a hostage an older woman who, it appears, just happened to be visiting the office at the time, and makes her way to an adjacent high-rise parking garage.

Once in the garage, however, it is quickly revealed that Kitty's hostage is much more than she initially seemed. As the goons close in, this woman suddenly whips off her dowdy business attire to reveal a skintight cat suit, then assumes one of those cat-like, battle ready ninja poses that let you know that the shit is on in no uncertain terms. What follows is an absolutely spectacular set piece in which quick cutting, masterful stunt work, and lots of blood packs combine to present us with the vision of two female badasses making hash out of an army of hapless stuntmen. 70 seconds later, when it's all ended with an explosion and the two women using a fire hose to rappel down the face of the parking structure, one can only catch one's breath and immediately reach for the replay button. Truly, what's most amazing about the sequence is that, despite its skittering pace, chaotic staging and lightning fast edits, the viewer is never left confused as to what exactly is happening or whom is doing what to whom. Michael Bay take note.

Kitty's new friend, it turns out, is a sort of hitwoman mother superior by the name of Sister Cindy (Taiwanese singer Kelly Yao, aka Wai Yiu), and, when Kitty next awakens, she finds herself in Cindy's house, which is basically a multicolored comic book funhouse well suited to being a villain's lair in an old episode of *Batman*. She also finds that her fingertips have been removed. Cindy tells her that she has decided to take her under her wing and train her as an assassin, and given that the alternative is for Cindy to either kill Kitty or turn her in to the police, Kitty reluctantly agrees. And so the training begins.

Like any hitwoman worth her salt, Cindy has a violently psychotic pedophile chained up in her basement, and Kitty's first lesson involves her being locked in with him with no choice but to kill him in order to get the key, which Cindy has planted on his person. Once this is out of the way, much of the other lessons involve Cindy drumming into Kitty's head the idea that her most formidable weapons are her body and feminine wiles, all the while groping and

fondling her suggestively. Finally, school is out and it's time for Kitty's first assignment, which involves icing a Yakuza at one of those classic 1990s erotic thriller nightclubs where there are half naked people in masks on the dance floor, orgies going on in the bathroom, and men quite literally snorting coke off the backs of whores. While Kitty's mission is completed successfully, it has the unfortunate consequence of the Yakuza hiring a rival pair of female assassins in order to get payback against her and Cindy — and these turn out to be none other than Princess and Baby. Princess, we learn, is a former pupil of Cindy's, one whom Cindy has warned Kitty to be wary of, as, unlike the two of them, who only kill people who "deserve" it, Princess and Baby would kill their own mothers — or mentors — for the right price.

Along with being something of a classic among Cat III films, *Naked Killer* is also a key entry in the whole "Girls With Guns" sub-genre that flooded Hong Kong's screens during the late 80s and early 90s. And, truly, it's hard to imagine a film that makes more explicit the already none-too-subtle "chicks with dicks" subtext of those particular movies. (Though, in saying that it's hard to imagine, I'm not suggesting that, in the varied and perverse world of Cat III and GWG cinema, another such film might not exist.) The film's world of male characters is made up either of violent, sexually predatory curs who deserve nothing less than the castration meted out to them by the female leads, or ineffectual neurotics like poor Tinam, who appears to have some difficulty with getting his "gun" to work properly in the first place. Really, in the end, it's only *Naked Killer*'s chicks who *have* the dicks. And while the film's depiction of lesbianism is — let's not kid ourselves — clearly intended to titillate, it ultimately ends up looking less "naughty" than it does to be the only sane alternative in the world the film presents. In this sense, *Naked Killer* reminds me a lot of the Japanese films in the Pinky Violence genre, as, like those films, it comes to its male viewers the self loathing already built in, reflecting them back to themselves as an unseemly parade of slaving potential rapists and impotent boy-men. I suppose all the better to be squished under Chingmy Yau's imposing thigh high boots.

And, of course, first in line to be squished is Tinam, whose investigation of the castration murders ultimately leads him to Sister Cindy's doorstep. However, by this time, Kitty has assumed a new identity, and, upon seeing Tinam, pretends to have no idea who he is. At this point, *Naked Killer* briefly feints toward being a sort of Hong Kong new wave take on *Vertigo*, but Tinam and Kitty's mutual attraction soon proves too strong to allow this situation to stand. We are treated to a montage of each masturbating languorously in his and her separate corners of Hong Kong, cluing us in that the mounting pressure will soon place them in bed together where we all now want them. When this does happen, I imagine that few will be surprised to learn that Tinam's former erectile difficulties are now firmly consigned to history. In fact, so heated is this coupling that Princess, spying on the two through her rifle's telescopic site, finds herself instantly in the throes of sexual obsession with Kitty, and, at the height of her arousal, discharges her weapon skyward in frustration.

Clarence Ford has said that his primary inspiration in making *Naked Killer* was Shaw Brothers director Chor Yuen's 1972 film *Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan*, while Wong Jing had wanted a Hong Kong version of the recent American hit *Basic Instinct*. Interestingly, the finished product does, to some extent, come across as a combination of Chor's more refined and elegant approach to eroticism and Paul Verhoeven's coarser one. Though I think that, in the end, Chor Yuen won out. Ford was uncomfortable with filming sex scenes, as well as with requiring nudity of his actresses, and so kept both to a minimum (certainly by Cat III standards, at least). He compensated for this by conveying sensuality through lushness of atmosphere and luxuriousness of texture, along with a voyeur's obsessive focus on the physical beauty of his actors. In other words, by an engagement with the truly erotic. Dated 1990s fashions and trip hop music notwithstanding, I don't think anyone can deny that Ford's is a movie that's oozing with a potent sexuality — one of the type that only gains intensity by it's proximity to mayhem.

And mayhem there indeed is, with Sister Cindy taking it upon herself to kill everyone who can establish a connection between Kitty's new identity and her former life, including Tinam's boss. Tinam himself only escapes as a result of Kitty's constant interventions. Meanwhile, Princess combines her stalking of Sister Cindy with an increasingly fevered erotic pursuit of Kitty, inspiring not a small amount of ire in the heart of the lethal Baby. It probably goes without saying, given all that has lead up to it, that the end will come in an epic conflagration fraught with grand tragic gestures and operatic bloodletting. Who would expect anything less?

Of course, it's easy to dismiss a film like *Naked Killer*. But, to me, it's only the subpar exploitation films that give sex and violence a bad name, while the ones like *Naked Killer* put sex and violence back on the pedestal where they belong. Rather than the nihilistic sleaze-fest that one might typically expect from the Cat III genre, *Naked Killer* is a film that rages with vitality, and offers about as good an example as I can think of of cinema's unique ability to show us a vision of our waking world merged with that of dreams. And by "dreams" I don't mean the kid stuff that Hollywood usually sells, but the sweaty adult variety, teeming with submerged guilt and forbidden desires. It's an aestheticized orgy of sex, death, lust and murder that, when it's all over, somehow leaves you feeling like the world is a pretty damn wonderful place. And for that I can only say this: Thanks once again, Hong Kong, for delivering. (by Todd of Teleport City)

**Never Say Regret (Hong Kong, 1990: Lau Kwok-Ho)** - This is a dark, bleak story, with many scenes filmed at night. The production values are better than usual, and there is a strong cast that includes Max Mok, Clare Wai, Eddy Ko and Dick Wei. Yukari has a strong screen presence, and fights not only with her martial arts but also a pistol and AK-47, as well as using various objects as spears or clubs. In a macho move, she rips the sleeves from her jacket to bandage others' wounds. She also makes a brief appearance wearing Chinese police (militia) uniform.

After being framed for drug smuggling and imprisoned in Mainland China, Yukari's character faces a death sentence after an escape attempt. She is befriended in prison by Clare Wai's character, and a mission to rescue her is launched from HK. Although the team initially succeeds by impersonating Mainland police, the escape plan misfires and they must flee on foot to the border, fighting a series of battles with the pursuing militia. The team members are killed one by one. After fighting their way through the border in action almost worthy of a war movie, Yukari and Max Mok survive long enough to exact revenge on the men who betrayed her back in HK. At one point, Yukari's character knocks one of these men down, pins him with her leg, and shoots him point blank in the face. The action, while brutal, is not gratuitous, and this film achieves considerable dramatic tension. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Naughty Boys (Hong Kong, 1986: Wellson Chin) - aka A Little Bit of Trick; The Violent Capers** - As unlikely as it may seem to some people, when I first heard the news a couple of months back re this not particularly well known 1986 movie having received a (budget) DVD release, I actually was gripped with a fairly high degree of excitement. This was primarily due to it being so that, for all of this Jackie Chan production being a minor entry in her filmography, that which is unlike such as *Shanghai*, *Shanghai* and *Stagedoor Johnny* in not being a period piece -- but similar to them in terms of it boasting kinetic action sequences and stunt work galore (by members of Jackie Chan's stunt team and others who have been professionally associated with the "Big Brother" of Hong Kong cinema) -- has been touted as being former TVB actress Carina Lau's maiden entry into the world of Hong Kong films (even while she also may have previously appeared, albeit in a much minor capacity, as one of the back up singers for "The Losers", in *Armor of God*).

Other casting choices that made NAUGHTY BOYS a "must check out" in this prepared-to-be-indulgent fan girl's admittedly quirky book included those that resulted in the awarding of prominent roles to: An easily recognizable stunt veteran of many of Jackie Chan's star vehicles (including *Project A I* and *II*, *Police Story I* and *III*) but also decades older works like *Come Drink With Me* (The uniquely monikered Mars was a member of the Drunken Beggar's youthful troupe); a former Shaw Brothers movie personality who was a HKFA Best Actress winner back in 1981 for her portrayal of the titular *My Young Auntie* (in the seemingly criminally under-rated -- by fans of post 1980 Hong Kong cinema -- Kara Hui Ying Hung); and a fellow whose most major claim to fame surely is for being the director of *Naked Killer* (i.e., the attractively boyish looking Clarence Fok). If nothing else, there also was the -- pretty fully fulfilled, as it turned out -- promise of its featuring a number of celebrity cameos (including by the film's producer as well as Ricky Hui) along with appearances by many with familiar faces but less well known names (e.g., character actors Stanley Fung, Dennis Chan and Charlie Cho, and Jackie Chan's former bodyguard, Ken Lo).

Considering the number of main plus minor characters that there are in NAUGHTY BOYS, it's a wonder that its story -- which has a whole bunch of people seeking, for various reasons, to get their hands on a cache of diamonds (which Mars' Sheng character and three of his buddies -- who are played by Tai Bo, Lo Meng and Phillip Ko Fei -- were sent to prison for stealing, and whose whereabouts they had never revealed to the authorities) -- was as intelligible as it was. Similarly, upon bearing in mind that the bulk of filming time, energy and budget probably was spent on the copious amounts of often very imaginatively choreographed fight and related scenes that are the visual highlights of this action plus comedy oriented movie, this (re)viewer is wont to look upon this offering's script as having been serviceable enough, even if obviously being not all that well crafted or polished.

After all, it did fairly logically establish connections between NAUGHTY BOYS' main male protagonist Sheng and Kara Hui's Chuan character (a loyal childhood friend of his whose fighting abilities men underestimate at their peril), two private investigators (The capable, including in gymnastics, Bonnie is portrayed by Carina Lau (and an obvious stunt double!) while her more bumbling partner -- whose personal name is Kuang and surname is Fu -- is played by Billy Lau) plus the manager of what turned out to be a fraud-incurring travel agency (named Liang and essayed by Clarence Fok). And while this Wellson Chin directed effort's characters' courses of action often aren't too clever plus advisedly orthodox (E.g., Bonnie's engineered first encounter with Sheng involved her running her car into the less than fortunate man!), they do provide the reason for the occurrence of those encounters on places as varied as someone's apartment, a rooftop, a junkyard and a godown that involve the kind of expertly enacted as well as designed action that distinguished many a 1980s Hong Kong action film (and are missing from those contemporary plus bigger budget actioners that are over-reliant on CGI, wires and fancy camera -- as opposed to honest stunt -- work).

As one might expect, Kara Hui, Mars and his Jackie Chan's Stuntmen Association cohorts are the individuals who provide the bulk of NAUGHTY BOYS' action highlights while Carina Lau, Clarence Fok and Billy Lau have greater comic responsibilities. Something that came as a bit of surprise though was the far from ugly, to my eyes, Kara Hui having the role of a plain Jane who the fellow her character appears to have carried a flame for for some years -- the hardly handsome Sheng -- overlooks in favor of a newer plus admittedly more buxomly female friend. With regards to this offering's other leading lady: For all of Carina Lau being cast as the physically attractive woman of more than one man's fantasy in the film, this early work of hers -- that involves her being lasciviously ogled, groped and having cockroaches thrown onto her person as well as taking her share of knocks -- is one more entry in the evidence list for this Suzhou-born beauty really having had to pay her dues in order to become as established and respected as she now is as a Hong Kong film personality. (by YTSL of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**New Kids in Town (Hong Kong, 1990: Lau Kar-Yung) – aka New Killers in Town; Master of Disaster** - Another very cheaply made HK action flick that I was hoping was a Moon Lee feature. The U.S. release was called *Master of Disaster* and spliced in a couple of Jackie Chan/Sally Yeh scenes from *The Protector* and this Amazon Prime version has two of those scenes - completely unrelated to the movie and, if you didn't know any better, absolutely confusing to the plot.

Eh, who watches these for the plot?

Moon Lee's two male cousins come to Hong Kong and they all immediately get tangled in a drug dealers business. It has its moments of what you watch these movies for, but it's pretty amateurish filmmaking, even by Hong Kong standards. Moon Lee is WAY underused, almost to the point of calling her appearance an extended cameo, especially if you figure in that she's a hostage for half the movie. One of Sophia Crawford's earliest HK movies, she's also underused, but the WORST example of underuse is Liu Chia-Liang as the uncle, who doesn't get to show these knuckleheads how to fight until the finale of the movie. The fights in the film aren't all that bad, they're actually fairly entertaining, but boy does he make everyone else look like they've been moving in slow motion!

I knew what to expect here - it just had a lot of people in it I enjoy watching. (by Chazgower01 of KFF)

**New Mr. Vampire (Hong Kong, 1986: Billy Chan)** - This is to the *Mr. Vampire* series what *Never Say Never Again* is to the James Bond films – an unofficial entry disguised as the real thing by borrowing actors and elements from the official series. It stars Chin Siu-ho from *Mr. Vampire* (1985), who later returned to the official series in part 5, *Vampire Vs. Vampire* (1989) and part 7 *Mr. Vampire 1992* (1992).

The great Lam Ching Ying isn't in this film. The main vampire hunter in this one, the Taoist monk role, is called Chein and is played by Wang Hsiao Feng.

Here's the story. It's around 1900. Two rival Taoist monks, who are brothers, names Chein and Wu are asked by a Mafia boss if one of them will transport his dead brother's corpse to the desired burial ground without it becoming a vampire (being a mobster, he'd done many bad deeds in his lifetime and is more likely to be refused entry to Heaven). Chein wins as he appears less incompetent and Wu gets jealous and tries to sabotage the journey by turning the corpse into a vampire, which he does.

Meanwhile a likeable grave-robber (Chin Siu-ho) enters the tomb of a beautiful, recently deceased young girl who is instantly struck by lightening along with Chin and the pair become walking reflections of each other; whatever he does, she does. They both meet up with the Taoist and capture the vampire and take it to a nearby hotel. A drunken army Marshal, grieving the suicide of his girlfriend, becomes suspicious of the monk and orders an investigation. He discovers the vampire and the girl's corpse, who happens to be his dead girlfriend and they spend the rest of the film trying to revive her and destroy him.

It's a very fast paced film with as much comedy as the previous films, even down to the recurring 'stupid policeman' role, something which appears in nearly all these films and appears to have been taken from 'Live and Let Die' (1973) (remember Sheriff J. W. Pepper?). Horror wise, like all these films, it's not in the slightest bit scary, but you're on the edge of your seat because of the suspense created by the situations; how will they evade the vampire if trapped in a lift with it etc.

The girl's corpse that imitates Chin, whilst a very clever idea, completely disappears from the second half of the film and she really should have made a comeback to tie up the loose ends. The main vampire himself (which doesn't hop, by the way, one of the elements from the official series the film maker's haven't used) is quite impressive, screaming and waving it's arms about like a banshee, it's long hair flailing behind it. They continue to use the traditional Chinese vampire hunting elements, chicken blood, wooden sword, holy wire; but in this film a few more traditional Western conventions enter the mix. Moonlight awakens the vampire, sunlight weakens it. One soldier even waves a crucifix at it seconds before it devours him! As for the way it's finally dispatched, well, it's not something I've ever seen in a Hammer Horror film, I can tell you that....you'll have to see it to find out how it's destroyed!

It's not in the same league as the original 'Mr. Vampire' which had originality and beautifully choreographed fights and wire-work on it's side, but as a follow-up, and a rival one at that, it's pretty impressive and it delivers more of the same style of goods that the official sequel, 1986's 'Mr. Vampire 2' didn't deliver due to it's contemporary, modern day setting.

I got this on VCD from a shop in Chinatown, London, UK. It's on 2 discs with both Mandarin and Cantonese audio on the left and right tracks (or you can pick 'stereo' and hear both tracks at once, which is confusing to say the least!). As usual the white English subtitles are literally translated and make little sense; they're also next to impossible to read over white on-screen objects. This was also a full screen transfer and it needed to be widescreen since the subtitles vanish often off-screen.

Recommended if you see it around, easily earns a 7/10. (by Dan Gayle of HKMDB)

**Night Life Hero (Hong Kong, 1992: Yuen Jung-Man)**- Chin Ka Lok and Max Mok owe Sing Fui On \$200,000 and spend most of the movie avoiding paying it.

Night Life Hero was a lucky find not by me but by a friend. It has something you WOULDN'T expect from a modern action movie; high quantity. In total there are six action scenes (seven if you count the small one in the alley) that are all done with fast kickboxing and stuntwork. And unlike most movies with Sam Wong and Ridley Tsui, Night Life Hero has extended scenes with them. One problem with the movie is the sound effects, and sometimes you're almost better off not listening to them. And while Max Mok usually has the speed to keep up with Sam Wong and Tsui, occasionally he'll be a little slow. Despite this the action scenes are all very well executed and it ranks with the higher-end modern stuff.

Chin Ka Lok has the first action piece when the credits come, a short part that revolves around a parked car. CKL hops all over it, slides through the windows, and slams the door on people's heads. Benny Lai and Ridley Tsui do the majority of the action, Tsui having the long shot of kickboxing and Lai getting tossed around. The other stuntman involved takes one nice backfall onto the top of the car and then onto the ground.

The scene immediately after involves Chin Ka Lok and Max Mok against the same stuntmen plus a half dozen more. Ka Lok is tossed around more this time and has less fighting than Mok, but still puts on a more believable performance. Most of his action is against Benny Lai, who does his standard quick kicks, and sadly this is about the extent of Lai's action-involvement in the movie. Mok's part has its ups and downs. He seems to stop his movements too soon, so when he punches he pulls back as soon as his hand comes near. His body never seems to go into it either. This shows up mostly when he's fighting a group (most armed with pipes, the stuntmen seem pretty economical in this movie). When he faces Ridley Tsui, another bunch of great shots of kickboxing, he does well since it involves mostly blocks. This scene has less stuntwork but there is a good looking backfall onto the top of a metal car lift. Probably the same stuntman as before.

Mok ends up in a scuffle against Sam Wong in an alley. All of the fighting is fast kickboxing with Sam doing some falls. Mok shows skill with some quick roundhouses and back kicks and takes Sam down, who pulls out his inhaler and turns into a madman. Still he can't win and has his men take over, Mok is less impressive and only wins when Sam Wong gets a broken bottle stuffed up his butt. Mok's best scene in the movie and maybe the best action he's ever done.

Mok has one more quick fight in an alley against 4 men. Very short, and it's all basic punch-block-return stuff.

Chin Ka Lok's fight against Sam Wong and Ridley Tsui in the restaurant is complete Chin Ka Lok madness. Half way through 4 women come to help but they don't pull off anything special. Ka Lok has some group fighting but most of

his action is against Ridley Tsui, again long to semi-long shots of fast kickboxing. Chin Ka Lok even does a couple acrobatic moves like a side flip over a kick and his spastic falls. Sam Wong's part against him is short but he makes an impression with a few kicking combinations. The scene is about 3 minutes long and drags with some of the female fighting. Otherwise it's pretty solid.

Another CKL fight, this time in an alley. First are 2 car stunts, the first where the stuntman rolls over the car violently and then Sam Wong jumping onto the hood and then flying off into a wooden stand. Everyone is armed with metal rods, CKL in the middle dodging and beating the others back, all doing falls afterward. Max Mok is lanky and his kicks are weird. His feet go high but his knee is still bent. It seemed as though they shot this scene around sunset by the looks of the lighting, so maybe it was rushed. Sure looks cool though.

The last scene is long where everyone fights at once. Mok fights Sam Wong in a storage room (short and nothing special), then faces another group in the usual fashion. Chin Ka Lok's parts are the best, by far. In some shots he dodges all over the frame while 2 or 3 men swing pipes that spark upon impacting metal. He does his normal thing of flipping around on bars and his left sided spin and butterfly kicks, even using the little wrap that was used to tie his hands together as a defense against the pipes. Ridley Tsui's bit against Mok isn't bad. Seems Tsui had to slow down for him, and the fight is mostly single moves in long shots that don't lead immediately into others. Tsui still shows off perfect spin kicks and jump spins and does yet another perfect backfall. Mok is confined to regular roundhouses that mostly go upward and not "round". Soon after they engage in a well choreographed weapon fight. Tsui shows off his opera skills, a rare show considering he always kickboxes in his movies, even doing a couple acrobatic moves. It's short but well choreographed, Mok again not keeping up as well. Basically a Ridley Tsui showcase. Chin Ka Lok's parts against Sam Wong are well executed too, in fact moreso, but they're too short. CKL does some kickboxing against Wong, and after Wong takes a hit of his inhaler he goes nuts, doing some flips and kicks, and a butterfly twist into a tornado kick. Sadly it ends right after that. Benny Lai gets no time in this end scene except beating up Chin Ka Lok at the end and eating a cockroach for Sing Fui On. What a waste.

Despite the end scene having too little of Chin Ka Lok (I bet Mok was available more often), the movie has a high action content, and the quality is very good. My only complaints are Mok's occasional pulled punches and kicks, the sound effects, and the same generic music that plays over and over. Other than that this is high class action fare. (by Eric Jacobus of the Stunt People)

**No Retreat, No Surrender 2 (USA, 1987: Corey Yuen) – aka Raging Thunder** - Lethal weapon Scott Wylde(Avedon) goes to Thailand to meet his girlfriend's parents and catch up with his old army buddy Mac(Thayer). Only things don't exactly go to plan, when the love of his life is kidnapped by a Russian/Vietnamese militia. Can Scott save her life?, or will the maniacal Russian General Yuri(Hues) and his army put end to the life of Martial Arts expert?.

*"Is that you I smell?, or the crocodile sh\*t"*

There's not much new I can say about *No Retreat No Surrender 2: Raging Thunder*, which really should be re-titled *Raging Gweilo* for this month's review theme. Seasonal films pulled off another action classic in this follow up to their 1986 movie *No Retreat No Surrender*. Now *Raging Thunder* has no connection to the first movie other than the similar title, and pretty much the same production crew. Corey Yuen is again both the director and fight choreographer with contributions from Mang Hoi, Man Chin-Ku and King Lee King-Chu. Jean Claude Van Damme dropped out at the last minute, which allowed Matthias Hues to make his screen debut by replacing him. According to his appearance on *Ric's Corner*, the producers randomly picked an American gym in the phone book and rang it up. Matthias just happened to walk through the door as the guy at Gold Gym California answered the phone call. When they described what kind of gym they needed, the man on the phone replied I've got just the person for you.

This Hong Kong production has a mainly gweilo cast which was a rarity for the time. Apart from the Japanese born Tae Kwon Do expert Hwang Jang Lee, there are no other major roles featuring Hong Kong actors. Yet despite the heavy emphasis on foreign talent on screen, it's purely Asian/Hong Kong talent who are handling things behind the camera. Corey Yuen's fifth movie is certainly one of his best, and in terms of action it's up there with the classics.

The film is not short on Martial Arts throw downs, Avedon's character has only been on screen five minutes and he's fighting some local Thai kickboxer. That's after we see a very young Cynthia Rothrock (*Above The Law*) show how well she can deliver a kick and punch in a sparring match. A great example of what Bruce Lee's character in *Way Of The Dragon* said about putting your whole body and hips into a strike. This lady could hold her own with any man in an onscreen fight. Corey Yuen and his team of assistant action directors really deliver some rapid and powerful looking fights. Which you would expect, when working with such a great cast of talents. There's a nice emphasis on



both flashy and practical looking kicks. One of the highlights for me see's Cynthia Rothrock face off against some lackeys with her hands tied behind her back. The Lady Dragon really proved she could hold her own with this amazing display.

The skills of Loren Avedon look even more impressive with a Hong Kong crew directing his every move. He does appear to be doubled for some of the more risky acrobatics, but for the most part he holds his own despite the demanding style of choreography. This was the first movie he made for Seasonal, as part of his three picture deal with the studio. When you get to see his talent for kicking and onscreen martial arts mayhem, its a real shame he never made more movies especially Hong Kong productions. With a 5th Dan blackbelt in Tae Kwon Do and 8th Dan Blackbelt in Hap Ki Do, its not hard to see why Corey Yuen and his team had a lot to work with. There's a superb close quarters fight in a shady run down hotel that really sums up the young Avedon's abilities at the time.

Now back to man who's bigger than a barn door the 6'5 250 pound German born Matthias Hues (*Fist Fighter*). Despite a background in athletics and bodybuilding, he had never received a single Martial Arts lesson prior to appearing in this production. Its a real testament to the filmmakers for making him look so skilled onscreen. His natural agility and athletic background helped a lot too. Without that his sheer size would not have been enough. The huge blond gweilo would go onto appear in many American productions, but I think this has been his only Asian production to date?. His encounter with Loren Avedon in the films frantic climax, is one most over the top and entertaining one on one fights of the 1980's. In this fight he is practically a one man demolition team. When Yuri tries to crush Scott Wylde with a desk, he is only saved by smashing the Russian over the head with a Vladimir Lennon picture. The only time I have witnessed a picture of the Russian dictator saving some ones life. Hue's really did a great job for a first time actor, playing the crazy Russian General Yuri.

It would have been nice to see more of Master Hwang Jang Lee in the movie but he's still a very welcome presence. Here he plays the yet another cold killer in the form of Vietnamese soldier Ty, who is working with the Russians. What Martial Arts he does perform, proves he was still a very skilled and dangerous man during his middle years. Special mention should also go to non Martial Artist Max Thayer as ex soldier Mac Jarvis. The typical movie American living in Asia, he loves seedy neon lit strip bars and wears really bad shirts while constantly puffing on a cigar. To top it off he's makes his living selling guns. This description could just about fit any American character in an 80's action film, who resides in Asia. Thayer has some nice chemistry with his co-stars and despite being doubled a lot more, he does put a lot of life into his part. He was even ex soldier in real life according to his [HKMDB](#) page. Still active in films to his day, he is currently being reunited with co-star Cynthia Rothrock in *Bitchfight*.

Before I bring my ramblings to a close there are a few more things I'd like to mention. The movie features some superb stunt work, one sequence involves some stuntmen climbing a steep waterfall. It's these men who really make the stars of the film look even better. Some of the action set pieces along with the screen combat would not look out of place in a 1980s Jackie Chan film. The sequence where Avedon's characters is on the phone to his girlfriend, whilst trying to keep the local pimp out of his room would not be out of place in a Chan film either. The comedy really helps the film in my opinion, but it doesn't become a big distraction. I think it allows you to enjoy the film more, because it shows the filmmakers were not taking things too seriously. That certainly helps with a low budget movie such as this one. The beautiful Thai actress Patra Wanthivanond isn't really given that much to do. She plays a fine damsel in distress but unfortunately that all she is allowed to be. From what little I know about the actress this was her one and only screen appearance?.

No Retreat No Surrender 2 may have been made on a tiny budget, but it certainly delivers big entertainment for Martial Arts fans. It's a must see if you enjoy 1980s Asian action cinema that packs a punch. Look out for mad Buddhists monks and a cameo by Hwang Jang Lee's student Roy Horan (*Snuff Bottle Connection*). Who not only produced this film, but contributed to the script too. (by DragonClaws of KFF)

**No Retreat, No Surrender 3: Blood Brothers (USA, 1990: Lucas Lowe)** - Brothers Will(Loren Avedon) & Casey(Keith Vitali), don't always see eye to eye. When their ex-secret serviceman father, is brutally killed by a fanatical terrorist group. They must put any personal differences aside, in order to-serve out their own brand of justice.

*"Revenge, doesn't retire"*

High kicking Martial Arts screen icon Loren Avedon, is back in his second starring role, as part of a three-picture contract with Seasonal Films. Former assistant for Chang Cheh Lucas Lowe(American Shaolin), made his directorial debut here. He was a last minute replacement for No Retreat No Surrender 1,2 director Corey Yuen(Kiss Of The Dragon). Lowe went onto direct a further two Martial Arts actioners, King Of The Kickboxer and American Shaolin,

both for Seasonal Film's. Despite the success of these movies on the then thriving home video market, Lowe moved to Canada in 2000, where he continued to work in T.V and film in North America, sadly non-of these productions were Martial Arts related. Apparently he didn't get on too well with producer and script writer Keith W.Stranberg, during this production. Lowe preferring to improvise more, rather than sticking entirely to the script, which didn't please Strandberg.

*"Even with my arm in a caste, I could still kick your ass"*

The movie opens with a bank heist, unlucky for the cash hungry thief's, Casey Alexander is among the crowd of innocent people. Faking a bad leg, he hops around on a crutch and pleads not to be shot. Before you can blink, he's picking off the bad guys, despite getting shot in the wrist. His crutch looks like something Q would have designed for James Bond, with a concealed blade. When Keith Vitali and Loren Avedon, were asked to perform a double kick on a punching bag, by the movies fight choreographer. Avedon successfully pulled off the move, and when Vitali performed the same movement, he ended breaking his wrist. Which is the reason for his character wearing a cast for the entire movie. It's also a testament to Vitali's work ethic, that he still performed really well in the many action sequences. I'm sure they would have shut down the production, had they made this under the Hollywood studios. Not a luxury the cast and crew of this independent movie could afford.

The superlative throw downs were brought to the screen by choreography wizard Tony Liung Siu-Lung(Bloodmoon). Younger brother and student of Bruce Liang(Bruce Siu-Lung). Tony Liung would go on to work with star Keith Vitali in the U.S production SuperFights(1995). Here Liung brings the Hong Kong action to U.S shores with style and flare. You just have-to see Loren Avedon's character introduction, to know you are in for a treat, in terms of the physical performances. The Tae Kwon Do and Hap Ki Do expert performs a nice little demo, which includes running up a wall, followed by a spinning kick to an opponent's head. You could say the action looks tame by today's standards?, or you could say some of today's fight choreography falls into the overkill category?. Where people are battered and maimed in a more contemporary video game style. While the action here is clearly influenced by the movies that came before it, including some nods to the Jackie Chan stunt team approach screen action.

When Franco(Rion Hunter) and his men invade former secret agent John Alexander's home, there's some great boot work on display from the extras. Ninjitsu expert Mark Russo as Franco's right-hand man, stands out in-particular. The bearded Martial Artist also performs an impressive alternative way to climb a staircase. Rion Hunter(The Doors) puts on a charismatic performance, as the albino villain who's also pretty handy with his fists and feet. While not on the same level as his henchmen or foes, Hunter still makes for a strong and slightly odd villain.

The reason I picked this particular-production, was due to the presence of intense ace kicker, Loren Avedon. Not that Keith Vitlai is any less talented or skilled, but it's Avedon's gravity defying, wild screen kicking style, that really grabs your attention. Performing a set of splits across a stair bannister, being just one prime example of this. Despite having a French sounding name, he was born and raised in the U.S. Appearing in some highly popular and successful movies, his filmography is not as extensive as you might expect. The actor said he passed on a chance to sign a contract with independent studio PM Entertainment, who would go on to have success with Don Wilson among other actors. Avedon's one of those actors, I'd love to have seen appear in a Jackie Chan or Sammo Hung movie. I think he would have been one of the few Westerners, who could have handled their highly demanding Kung Fu ballets. He worked out for four to six hours a day, for six months, just to get in shape for this film. Showing just how dedicated he was to his movie career.

When the movies reaches its climatic two on two duel in the air plane hangar, it's no disappointment. Rion Hunter and Mark Russo go all out in their fight with the two heroes. A fast paced and frenetic throw down, with some great use of a small scaffolding tower. Hunter is clearly doubled for some of the more elaborate moves, but he still holds up well against some of the more experienced cast members. Vitali not to be out done performs a nice assisted back spinning heel kick, from a prone position on the floor. Like the previous two No Retreat No Surrender movies the finale is a classic, and it's hard for me to say just which movie in the series has the best end fight?. My only gripe, and it's a very small one at that, is how they decide to end this fight. Which I won't go into detail about here, as it reveals the ending for anyone yet to see this.

Seasonal Films U.S based productions, such as this one, really had their own unique feel and style. Really wish the company had made more of this type of movie. While the picture is clearly low budget, they've really put a lot of effort into the production, especially the fight scenes. They knew fans were not watching these films to see Laurence Olivier or Al Pacino levels of quality acting. The sequence where the two brothers discover their deceased fathers body, is a classic lesson in over acting. According to IMDB, Avedon wouldn't stick to the script and this didn't help Vitali who was trying to stay true to Keith W.Standbergs dialogue. For me, the over the top acting suits the

larger than life characters and story telling. That said, veteran Hollywood actors Luke Askew (Pat Garrett & Billy The Kid) and Joseph Campanella are welcome additions to the cast, with their more restrained performances.

Overall, it's a must-see movie for Martial Arts fans, especially those who prefer the old school Hong Kong flavour of action. The fact they filmed the entire movie in the U.S, should not put you off, if you're not a fan of Western Martial Art cinema. The movie isn't perfect of course, and there are some unintentionally comedic moments. Such as when Keith Vatalis character, bursts out of a static car window with the power of a speeding bullet. This being a late 80's production means, athletic actress Wanda Acuna is mostly there to show off her curvier than curvy curves. Though she plays a vital role in the movies closing act. Re-watching this actioner made me think that there should have been further instalment's in this series. Loren Avedon would team up again with Tony Leung Siu-Lung and Director Lucas Lowe for King Of The Kickboxers. Which was also released in some country's as No Retreat No Surrender 4. Still, I think there's room for another film with Avedon playing the wise master who must fight an old enemy. With the help of two new students, perhaps played by Alain Moussi and Scott Adkins?. I'll end it here before I ramble on for another five paragraphs. (by DragonClaws of KFF)

**Night Caller (Hong Kong, 1985: Phillip Chan)** - Since this film was released in 1985 to minimum box office appeal (ranked 53rd for the year as per HK Movie Database) it has slowly gained a reputation as one of the better suspense films to come out of HK. And for good reason as Phillip Chan (best known as Chow Yun Fat's supervisor in Hard Boiled) directs a tautly paced thriller that keeps you on the edge of your seat (or bed in my case!) for much of the film. Just as important though is the fact that it slows down from time to time to allow for some character development. The character development is crucial because it makes the outcome all the more nerve wracking.

People have pointed out that the opening scene seems very much influenced by the Italian slasher films of the time – bloody, brutal, stylish – as a woman is butchered by an unseen (but known to the victim) assailant. This is all witnessed by the woman's young daughter who hides in the closet stricken with fear. Her doll though begins talking and the killer realizes that someone else is there. The killer starts thrusting the blade through the closet panels in search of the little girl. So begins this little thriller.

It switches gears though as three cops are assigned to run the killer down. Phillip Chan and Melvin Wong are partners and Pat Ha is a new cop on the force just learning the ropes. Chan is a revelation here as he gives a charismatic portrayal as a tough as nails cop with a strong sense of justice. Wong is also terrific as a slightly mellower cop with a beautiful wife waiting for him at home.

The film then becomes more of a police procedural film as the three of them try and run down clues and question suspects. The sexy Pauline Wong is warned by Chan that she may be next on the list. Halfway through though, the identity of the slasher is revealed to the viewer, as this person captures Wong who is getting too close and begins torturing him.

This is when the film goes into high gear as Chan and Ha desperately search for some answers before time runs out for their friend. Leads keep running into dead ends – and so they fear will their partner. Chan directs this in a wonderfully precise manner without a wasted moment and the tension rises as the killer gets closer and closer to deciding that Wong is expendable.

There are a few funny little quirky scenes that lighten the mood a bit and add coloring to the film. Such as the coroner pulling out a drawer with a corpse and reaching for a cold beer inside or the killer's freaky accomplice who's name is Mickey breaking into a perverse dance and singing "Hey Mickey you're so fine. Blow my mind. Hey Mickey" to a tied up Wong.

One of the main reasons I wanted to see this besides it's fine reputation was to see Pat Ha in a film. She gained immortality in my eyes with her brilliantly cool performance as the efficient assassin in Yuen Biao's 1988 film On the Run. Her career spanned only ten years from 1982 - 1992 and she made far too few films in that time. Here regretfully she really doesn't have much to do but tag after Chan – though she does have a lovely On the Run moment near the end.

This is just an excellent though modest film that will definitely involve you – and I am surprised that Chan apparently only directed a few films after this one. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Nocturnal Demon (Hong Kong, 1990: Ricky Lau)** - Warning: While Moon Lee fans will certainly enjoy her performance and quite possibly enjoy the movie as well, I have a distinct feeling that this film can only be enjoyed by a select few. Then again, maybe not. This is one of those movies you just have to see for yourself. The purpose of the review here is to provide a brief, yet informative description (without any spoilers) of what this movie is about and if I liked it. Now that that's out of the way, shall we proceed?

The Nocturnal Demon -- A psychotic killer brutally slashes his (usually female) victims to death when nightfall shrouds the city. Sounds like this could be a pretty scary movie doesn't it? Actually, this is a comedy. A very bizarre comedy! But you wouldn't expect that from its disturbing first couple of minutes. Then the beginning credits and cheesy synth music start and you realize you're in for a strange ride.

Now the highlight of any film starring Moon Lee is...Moon Lee. The ever-perky Moon is even more perky than usual. Here she plays Wawa, a seventeen-year-old girl from the Mainland that's visiting her relatives. And she looks cute as ever sporting a bob hairstyle. On the way to her relatives she witnesses a jewelry store being robbed by none other than Yuen Wah. Seeing that the bumbling cops are having trouble detaining him, Moon lends some assistance by kicking the crap out of Wah while wearing roller skates. This scene is a favorite among hardcore Moon fans and it's easy to see why.

When Moon arrives at her relative's place she is greeted by her blind grandfather and dorky cousin (Alfred Cheng). I'm not sure who played the grandfather but he almost steals the show. Some of the funniest moments involve him. Like when he gives Alfred Cheung money to buy him some nice clothes. Instead, Alfred goes to a thrift store and picks out some cheap shirts. One of the shirts he picks out for gramps has a Betty Boop design on it!

Things start to go wrong for Moon and Alfred when Alfred is mistaken for the lighter-fluid inhaling psycho that's been murdering young women and feeding them to his pet fish. Things get even worse when Moon is thought to be an accomplice. When the police start pursuing them they realize they must catch the killer themselves to clear their names. More hilarious moments are when they use various disguises in their quest for the killer.

Most people might think of Moon Lee as an action actress and rightly so, however after watching The Nocturnal Demon you will get to see what a natural talent she has for comedy. Her expressions are so animated and energetic it's impossible not to smile. (by Jack Sobjack of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Oh! Yes Sir!!! (Hong Kong, 1994: Frankie Chan)** - After watching this film, I have to wonder whether Frankie Chan might suffer from a type of attention deficiency disorder. He seems to have trouble focusing and this film is all over the map as he comes up with a multitude of various plot lines only to leave most of them hanging out to dry like a forgotten pair of socks in the washing machine. For example, the conflict with the girlfriend -- what ever happened to her I wonder, the ghost that comes back for revenge -- oops -- forgot about that thread as well and so on. The film is a complete mish-mash of action, comedy and the supernatural and even Frankie's action scenes are much weaker than usual and are not nearly enough to hold one's flagging interest.

Frankie plays Power Chan a short-tempered cop who is jealous of his Cat III actress/girlfriend and thinks she is fooling around with sleazy director Charlie Cho. After beating him up -- Chan and his partner come into conflict with the next door neighbor -- a fortuneteller with supernatural abilities. Eric Tsang plays this person -- as a woman -- or perhaps as a transvestite and has his voice dubbed by a female. In fact, there are some odd gender things going on in this film. His male partner boasts about his sexual conquests with women -- and one character -- a prostitute called Papaya -- confirms that he was with her the week before -- but there is something out of kilter with this fellow. Did I see or imagine that he seemed to have breasts? I don't know -- the film certainly never reveals this to be the case.

Anyway, the main gist of the film is that the two of them are after a weapons dealer who has three gweilo killers in his employ -- Mark Houghton, Jeff Falcon and Kim Maree Penn. The gun dealer also has a specialized killer on his payroll -- one who can take on the looks of anyone -- and disguises himself as Frankie and eliminates a witness and a couple of cops. So Frankie and his partner are blamed for the crime and have to go into hiding -- sort of -- as no one really seems interested in catching them. Maybe the cops were as bored as I was. Frankie and partner use the psychic abilities of Eric to track the fellow down and that leads to a big brouhaha at the end. There are a number of fights in the film -- not badly done, but nothing exceptional either -- and when the video finally ran down I was more than a bit relieved.

In one of those “isn’t that a weird co-incidence” moments, I later was looking through the film *Skinny Tiger and Fatty Dragon* for some pictures of Karl Maka for the Actor Index section – and lo and behold there was Frankie’s partner again – with a slight difference – he was in a dress – playing Karl’s wife – and sure enough the name Wanda Yung Wai-tak appears in the credits of both films! (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**On the Run (Hong Kong, 1988: Alfred Cheung)** - Wow what a movie. Hands down this is Yuen Biao's best acting performance ever (which is hard to say because of the three brothers, no the SEVEN BROTHERS I think he's done the best acting of them all, whenever he's on screen with them, he's a better actor, period). Without a doubt the camerawork and atmosphere of this is unlike any HK movie ever created. And to satisfy you all, I have to admit I've never seen a fight scene so realistic the one in the ending of this film.

Just a little tip to you though. This is very light on action. Don't expect endless Yuen Biao fights, or even a classic HK fight at all. There is none. There are some small action scenes that lead up to the finale (nothing remarkable), so whoever only looks for action in a movie can flip to the end of the film, miss the whole point of everything, forget acknowledging Yuen Biao's acting ability and just be happy with some sheer brutality at the end, for you I give the movie a 2/5 for that scene. Go live in your fight-based world free of acting and true cinema skills.

For the rest of you who can appreciate this movie, the whole thing is centered around the mass emigration from Hong Kong at the end of 1997 before communist China took over. Yuen Biao, who plays Heung Ming, a police officer hoping to emigrate, and his ex-wife are talking when a terrible twist of fate occurs that sends Biao into a frenzy, discovering that Charlie Chin had committed a crime to emigrate himself. Biao finds Chin, the pretty boy from the Lucky Stars films with Eric Tsang, Richard Ng and group, with the help of Pat Ha Man Jik, who plays the killer from the beginning, and fights full force until the end.

Another surprise here is Charlie Chin. If you remember, he's the taller of the early lucky stars, the one who's always supposed to get the women. Talk about out of character. I used to hate the guy but in this he pulls off his role flawlessly. Yuen Wah is his cowardly side kick who pleads with others to save his life. Yet ANOTHER out-of-character role. Wah rarely, no, NEVER plays a coward, and in this he does it perfectly. In the end the viewer has no feeling for him other than pity because he's a tool, completely used by Chin. Ko Fei and Lo Leih play tougher men who also play their roles very well.

But Biao is clearly the force behind the movie. He literally carries everything. Ha Man Jik helps, she doesn't exhibit nearly the amount of flare as Biao, yet she's still able to break out of her killer persona when a close one dies. There's one scene where a loved one of Biao is shot unexpectedly and the viewer is shocked, Biao carries that shock into himself. I have to admit I had some tears coming up.

Ok fine I'll talk about the finale. But first I'll point you to a stunt SOMEONE did where Heung Ming grabs a bamboo piece of scaffolding, falls down to a light post, falls off and hits the top of a parked van. Was it Biao? From above, it seems so. But I'm not sure, and considering this was filmed around 1988, I dunno.

And the end fight. Pretty awesome. Sammo produced this movie so I bet he had a hand in the action, but the choreography isn't anything like what I expected. I thought violent HK movie = *Hero* (with Kaneshiro), but I'm wrong. That's pretty violence. This is like putting two angry men in an office, setting up 10 cameras and filming it. If you're in a real fight and you have a knife sticking through your leg, and you see a phone book, what do you do with it? Hit it over the guy's head until it breaks. What happens if you see an opportunity to kick him? Kick him until you can't anymore. A headlock? Hit his head a thousand times. This is a real fight without a doubt. There's a time when Chin has Biao's head against a record player and he pounds it with his forearm fifty times until Biao sticks scissors in his leg. All of it is filmed perfectly, half of the shots are just on Chin's face to show how desperate he is to get away alive. And I swear when Biao is elbowing Chin's face most of those made contact. Easily the most brutal thing I've ever seen.

I've heard the Tai Seng VHS ends abruptly with a picture Biao and Ha explaining what happens next and then the credits roll. I believe my VCD is a longer version but I'm not sure it's the longest because it has that picture as well as some extra video before it of them leaving on a boat. Do some research into the various versions available and pick the best one.

*On the Run* is a movie that I would do. I would make a story about a time-relevant subject, make everyone play roles they've never played (Wah as a coward? Jeez!), give it some minor action and just let them go at it in the end

without any unnecessary glamour. No kung fu, just violence. If you've got an open mind to action, then I strongly suggest you check this out. If you enjoy Biao's acting ability and his persona, do your best to get the best version of this out there. I told myself I'd only watch half of it before I went to bed but I couldn't shut it off. I don't even remember what I did while watching it. As a whole it's possibly Biao's best overall performance ever.

5/5 - as a movie and for the ending's brutality, but for action freaks with closed minds who only care about action, 2/5. (by Eric Jacobus of The Stunt People)

**Once A Thief (Hong Kong, 1991: John Woo)** - *Once a Thief* is a strange little crowd-pleaser from Hong Kong. For John Woo's many US fans, it may come as a surprise that Woo made *Once a Thief* between the bullet-ridden *Bullet in the Head* and the even more bullet-ridden *Hard Boiled*. But Woo has a history of making comedies, and *Once a Thief* is the last one he made in Hong Kong.

In usual HK fashion, the characters of *Once a Thief* seem to be trapped in a complex web of melodramatic relationships. The main characters are Joe (Chow Yun Fat), Jim (Leslie Cheung), and Cherie (Cherie Chung), a trio of flamboyant art thieves operating out of Paris. How flamboyant? Well, they steal a painting that is being transported from the Louvre to another museum via truck by using an elaborate plan that involves perfume, a convertible, a motorcycle, Joe breaking into the back of the moving truck, Jim hanging on to the underneath of the truck and sawing through the floor, and parasailing. In any case, Joe, Jim and Cherie were adopted at an early age by a cruel HK crime lord Chow (the actor who played Danny Lee's partner in *The Killer*) who raised them as his own children. Assuming that he didn't like for own children very much. But he taught them to steal and the three of them call him 'Dad.' Also during their childhood they were befriended by a beat cop who they now call 'Papa.' Papa (the actor who played Chow Yun Fat's partner in *The Killer*) has a knack for showing up at the most inopportune moments in the story.

OK, that's the background. The plot really kicks in when Jim and Joe steal a cursed painting from a weird castle at the behest of French collector. The collector betrays them for no particular reason and has his henchmen try to kill them. A huge car chase/shoot-out ensues, and doesn't end until Joe jumps his car off a pier head on into a speedboat carrying bad guys. Big boom follows.

With Joe thought dead, Jim and Cherie retire to Hong Kong and get married. Two years later, Joe shows up, confined to a wheel chair. It seems the cursed painting is now owned by Chow, so Joe and Jim decide to steal it from him to teach him a lesson.

Even though *Once a Thief* features a good dollop of gun-fueled mayhem, this really is a comedy. Most of the heist scenes are pretty ridiculous, and there are lots of scenes where the three amigos doing cute things together, like eating at sidewalk cafes and celebrating birthdays. And if you don't think somebody is going to end up being pushed into the pool of their French villa, you really need to see more movies.

Other times, the humor borders on Looney Toons. In one inexplicable scene, Joe sets a charge to blow up a bank vault door. It seems he 'wires it wrong', though, and a section of wall blows up, where no explosives were placed. At another point in the film, Joe and Jim square off against Dad's henchmen. Jim sets a booby trap by putting a couple cans of Coke in a microwave, turning it on, and putting a basketball in front of it. The microwave explodes, propelling the now flaming(!) basketball into a bad guy, pushing him out a window. We won't be surprised if this gag shows up in Home Alone 3.

And the movie is very topical! At one point, Joe is fighting a man who throws playing cards with deadly results. Joe catches the cards, coming up with specific hands, like black jack. After one throw, Joe comes up with all aces and declares, "So many Ace! You must have AIDS!"

Chow Yun Fat is in full gear in this movie, doing anything he needs to elicit the emotion that the scene requires. He chortles, pulls comedic wheelies in his wheel chair, sings, and of course shows off his trademark shit-eating grin as often as possible. Overall, Chow seems to be trying to emulate Cary Grant in *It Takes a Thief*, down to his hairstyle. Chow is a consummate actor, and always fun to watch.

Pity poor Leslie Cheung. He really doesn't get it. Jim should probably be the main character, the one that we relate to, but Leslie doesn't give us anything to remember. It's not to say Leslie is a bad actor, or that he gives a bad performance, but the key to acting in John Woo movies is to overact, or else you will get steamrolled by all the stylish camera work. And this situation is exacerbated by the fact that Chow Yun Fat gives one of his most over-the-top performances. Leslie may as well being playing the painting for all the screen presence he has. It's like what

would happen if Cary Grant and Bruce Cabot were to star in a movie together (Hint: There's a reason you don't know who Bruce Cabot was).

But special pity should be reserved for Cherie Chung, who is given a totally thankless role to perform. Like most of the women in John Woo films, she is totally left out when most of the interesting stuff happens. Not once, but twice, is Cherie told by Jim and Joe to go wait at an airport while the men go get into a fight that moves the plot forward. This kind of thing makes sure that she leaves little impression on the viewer. The only exception is a really great ballroom dancing sequence, where she pickpockets a gallery owner while she dances.

The bottom line is that this is a piece of light entertainment. If you want the usual deep, dark world of John Woo, it isn't here. But if you want to see Chow Yun Fat ham it up, some cool shoot outs, some really goofy humor and one neat car chase, *Once a Thief* may be worth seeking out. (by Scott Hamilton and Chris Holland of Stomp Tokyo)

**Once Upon a Time in Manila (Philippines, 1994: Tony Reyes)** - Police Lieutenant Cynthia Wang (Yukari) is an HK police detective investigating the murder of a man who possessed documents incriminating a gang. His Philippino maid flees with the papers to her homeland. Wang then travels to the Philippines and links up with the maid's son, who is a Philippino police officer. Sub-plot diversions involve goofy Philippino police antics, and a romance. Yukari has some brief but good fight scenes, and performs in English. She appears trim and athletic. The plot involves a predictable confrontation. Generally, this is a formulaic Philippino actioner. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Operation Pink Squad (Hong Kong, 1988: Jeff Lau)** - A female police officer in Hong Kong had a tough life. According to countless movies of the 1980s and 1990s she had to deal with incompetent superiors, corrupt counselor, fellow officers who couldn't write a parking ticket without bungling it and evildoers armed with guns that never ran out of bullets. While her male counterparts were saddled with the same problems they made things more difficult for her with their patronizing attitudes, leering looks and outright hostility. Half the battle for a policewoman on the RHKP was to be accepted as a cop by her fellows. "Operation Pink Squad" recounts the struggle of four of them in lurid detail. It is an undistinguished effort with obvious gags that go on much too long, a plot that keeps losing track of itself and characters with whom it is impossible to empathize. It is worth watching (but not very closely) for one very good fight, a few genuinely funny scenes and Anne Bridgewater.

Inspector Wu wants to get rid of the women from disbanded Pink Squad, thinking they bring disrepute to the police force, although what they actually do is arrest quite a few violent criminals. He gives them almost impossible assignments hoping that they will fail but they not only carry out the assignment but almost casually detain other bad guys they encounter. More direct, Officer Hung (part of the brain trust of the precinct—their collective IQ is probably in the very low triple figures) suggests they hire the Bamboo gang to get rid of them. Wu and crew are so busy figuring out how to get rid of the girls that they have no time left to fight crime. There is a comic set piece in which the four women are watched through a two-way mirror by a squad of male detectives who react like horny 12 year old boys. The Pink Squad figures out very quickly that they are being spied upon so they do as much as they can to tantalize and frustrate their watchers, pretending to strip but turning away before showing anything and even acting as if there is a Sapphic attraction between two of them which has their watchers all but foaming at the mouth. An Anglo superintendent shows up at the station, his blonde wife in tow, and we know it is just a matter of time before she is unknowingly giving a show—the superintendent sees the detectives ogling his lingerie clad spouse who Inspector Wu has already inadvertently referred to as a "white pig". Oops.

The fight occurs relatively early while the squad is doing undercover surveillance at a karaoke club while impersonating hostesses. Jeff Falcon is an assassin with a list that they need to get. Flower grabs him while he tries to escape through a bathroom. In addition to the very athletic punches and kicks that both deliver, she hits him with a metal stool; he hits back with a wooden bench. He tries to strangle her with a towel; she tries to strangle him with an electrical cord. He is electrocuted and in what might be a postmodern nod through the fourth wall, Anne Bridgewater (Flower) says, after retrieving list from his body "He always ends up like this" which could mean Falcon, the gweillo tough guy who seems to die in each of his roles.

Their next assignment is narcotics surveillance with the "Tiger Squad" which is the operational force. It is clear from their first encounter that members of the Tiger Squad and the Pink Squad have a romantic history, an issue that becomes more important than watching the criminals they are trying to arrest. Some of the lines in these scenes may be funny in Cantonese but didn't survive the slicing and dicing used to create the subtitles.

There are a few funny scenes, many more that were clearly supposed to be funny and weren't and a lot of padding. Funny is when Sandra Ng accidentally arrests driver of a getaway truck that was illegally parked, then impersonating

him when the robbers pile into the back of the truck. They are armed with shotguns, grenades and a rocket launcher which she tries to keep them from firing at the pursuing police. Not funny (although it probably sounded hilarious before the cameras rolled) was Sandra Ng pretending to be blind in order to get close to the subject of yet another investigation, a blind musician who the police think has a cache of stolen diamonds.

By no means the worst movie of 1988 but not recommended. (by ewaffle of HKMDB)

**Operation Pink Squad II (Hong Kong, 1989: Jeff Lau) – aka Thunder Cops** - When I first discovered Hong Kong cinema, one of the things that really stood out for me, and took me quite a while to adjust to, was the amount of comedy shoehorned into their movies. Grand-scale action scenes and mind-blowing fight choreography are easier for a Westerner to be impressed by — but the childish humour was a little hard to accept. I am not talking about a Bondian style quip, like ‘bang on time’ after an explosion, but mugging, pulling faces, and doing strange monkey dances in an almost cartoon fashion. I have often wondered where this comic sensibility came from. It is often attributed to Jackie Chan — suggesting that it was an antidote to the po-faced violence and posturing of the actors that attempted to follow Bruce Lee. It has been said that the post-Lee films became increasingly violent to cover up for the fact that the actors involved were not as charismatic or as good martial artists as Bruce Lee.

Then along came Jackie Chan — the clown prince — and then suddenly large amounts of comedy were injected into action films. Or so the story goes. I have a variation on that. Sure Jackie’s films can be funny — but if you look at most of the films that Jackie made in the 1970s there’s not too much humour. Of course there are exceptions, such as *The Drunken Master* — probably because Jackie was on the same wavelength trying to find something new. But I believe the first film — the guiding light if you will, was Lau Ka Leung’s first film as director, *Spiritual Boxer*, which starred Wang Yu as a confidence trickster who claims he is possessed by the spirits of the Gods, particularly that of the Monkey King — and hence, a lot of jittery, twisted facial expressions and mugging. It starts here. For what it’s worth, that’s my guess where the comedy started to cross over into other genre’s in Hong Kong cinema. Of course, that’s all one big broad generalisation, and I’m sure you’ll all have other different opinions, which are as equally valid as my addled ramblings.

Now, you’re probably wondering why I am talking about crazy comedy in a Hong Kong Horror themed post? Well, the film under the microscope today is *Operation Pink Squad II*, and it is a horror, ghost story, martial arts, comedy farce. That alone should tell you quite a bit about the movie — it has a bit of everything in it, and it’s all over the place. But these movies were made to entertain and generally *Operation Pink Squad II* does that — the proviso being that you can stand that very broad style of Hong Kong comedy intertwined with your action and thrills.

Before I go any further however, as you read this review, you’ll notice I haven’t presented the actors who play the roles in the film — this is not laziness. I have looked up several sources, including jotting down character and credits named as I watched the film, and everything seems to conflict with each other. Rather than taking my best guess, or citing information that is incorrect, I feel it is better to leave it open. At the end of the day, knowing the name of the crazy guy in glasses will not add or detract from your enjoyment of this film. Just go with it.

*Operation Pink Squad II*, also known as *Thunder Cops* concerns the story of four police women and their male superior officer who are trying to bust a Japanese counterfeit ring. As the film opens we are introduced to a couple who have just been married. Both of them work for the Hong Kong police department. On their wedding night, the man, who is never really named, but I’ll call Fat Cop who is still a virgin, finds out that his new wife has already been deflowered (don’t you love that euphemism?). To make matters worse, that evening, while sleeping she has an erotic dream, and calls out the name Johnny. Remember that name — ‘Johnny’.

Fat Cop already feels inadequate for marrying tainted goods, but now after her dreamy ramblings, he is totally pushed over the edge into being a total paranoid maniac. He has to hunt down and kill ‘Johnny’ — whoever it may be. To that end, on their way to work the next day, he slips a listening device into her handbag so he can hear what she is up to all day. The Superintendent at the precinct has an assignment for his three best policewomen — and his niece, Mun who is a junior police woman trying to rise through the ranks. Four Japanese nightclub hostesses (for that, read — prostitutes) attempted to smuggle into Hong Kong some counterfeit printing plates for a crime syndicate. The hostesses were stopped at the airport and arrested. Now the four policewomen are to take their place and arrest the Hong Kong connection in the scheme. This mysterious connection is called ‘Big Oath’.

Of course, as a newly wed, Fat Cop’s Wife doesn’t want the assignment. But the Superintendent really wants her on the case. What I haven’t mentioned, is that the Superintendent’s name is Johnny, and as he tries to convince Fat Cop’s Wife to take the assignment, he says things like ‘I need you one last time.’ Of course, Fat Cop is listening in to



the conversation and believe the super and his wife are talking about sex, rather than the assignment. Fat Cop's paranoid jealousy pushes him over the edge and he starts to plot to kill both the super and his wife.

To the mission. The police superintendent arranges for accommodation in Maple Towers, which is an old multi-story apartment block complex. He goes along with his police women on the mission, but so he won't arouse suspicion, he dresses in drag. Cue – boob jokes. Unfortunately for 'Pink Squad', Maple Towers has a slight ghost problem which everybody seems to know about, except for them. To alleviate this, the caretaker of the building arranges for a kung-fu fighting Buddhist priest (Cheung-Yan Yuen) to come to the building and clean out the ghosts. And clean them out he does, capturing each of them and squishing them into little cloth bags.

As the priest takes his haul of sixty ghost filled bags down to the basement — and the doorway to hell — he drops one of the bags and it scuttles off. The priest, once he has sent the ghosts back to hell believes his work is done and leaves the building. The ghost that has escaped, though, is the nastiest of the bunch. Meanwhile, Fat Cop turns up intent on killing both his wife and Johnny. As intense as this sounds, it is played out in a slapstick manner. So that's the comedy. Now as this is a Halloween themed post, I guess you're wondering about the 'horror' aspect of this film. Let's get to it!

What we then have is four police women, one police man in drag, and one deranged husband trapped in a building with a vengeful ghost. This leads to some mild horror and a lot of running around screaming. It gets even wilder when our inept heroes chop off the ghost's head with an axe. Now the head flies around the corridors chasing them, as does the headless body with a knife, but no eyes to see where to stab. Twice the trouble. Then the boss of the counterfeit ring, 'Big Oath' arrives to close the deal for the plates. He is carrying a bag full of money. Somehow in the chaos and the commotion, the ghost's head flies into the money bag and the counterfeiter takes it off site.

Of course, when Big Oath opens the bag, he is rather dismayed to find a ghost's head in the bag. His immediate reaction is to kill the thing, and he attempts this by exposing the head to daylight, where it would burst into flames. The problem for Big Oath, as the ghost kindly points out, that by burning her head, he will also burn all his filthy money. She proposes an agreement where he takes her back to the apartment building, and she'll let him have the money. Making a deal with a headless ghost, who plans to open the gates to hell in the basement — and let all her demonic friends through — is probably not the best idea, but Big Oath goes along with the plan, and return to Maple Towers.

By the time Big Oath and the ghost return, our disparate band of heroes, have buried the hatchet (so to speak — most likely the one used to chop off the ghost's head), and have teamed up to formulate a plan to take down the ghost. All monsters have a little chink in their armour that allows them to be defeated. With Vampires, it's a wooden stake through the heart, with werewolves, it's a silver bullet. So what item could defeat an angry ghost's head that is flying around the corridors of a haunted building? Good question, and one that the film-makers have thought long and hard about. Their solution, naturally enough, is a squadron of remote control toy helicopters. I don't know why I didn't think of that! Yes, toy helicopters! And with that, our band of heroes, man the controls of their helicopters and chase the flying head through the building — in the process providing one of the great WTF moments in cinema.

This as you'd expect from a Hong Kong horror, martial arts, ghost story comedy farce is a pretty weird film — probably pushing the boundaries of genre entertainment (that is, if you can work out what genre the film is). The film's alternate title, *Thunder Cops* may lead you to believe that you're in for some entertainment in a similar vein to Jackie Chan's *Police Story*. Don't believe it. This film almost appears ignorant of the fact that this film is all over the shop — gleefully so. And possibly, that is this film's strength. It just goes for 'it' — even though it doesn't really know what 'it' is. The comedy scenes are frantic and simply juvenile, but the whole film is played out at such pace, one minute you're groaning at some toilet humour, then you're marvelling at a kung-fu scene, but before you can settle into that, there's a neat bit of suspense, which in turn is ruined by another joke about 'wetting your pants'. Man, this film is broad, but it moves. In places it's like a smutty version of Abbott & Costello crossed with *Evil Dead 2*, and I can imagine that a great deal of viewers will enjoy it. I was after more kung fu ass kicking, than farcical mugging, but having said that, I am sure on another given day, I will take time to watch this film again and think that it is an absolute classic. I was still floored, but it wasn't what I expected.

However once *Operation Pink Squad II* enters your life, it is a film that you will watch again. Even if you don't like it, you'll be drawn to it. It is the siren song of crazy-ass cinema. There are some truly wonderful, frenetic, jaw-dropping sequences going on. And, as I am not one for presenting wholesale spoilers, I haven't even mentioned the ending, where things get really bloody, by Cat II standards anyway, but no less weird than the preceding seventy minutes. This film is absolute madness, and as such, I heartily recommend it to you all. (by Keith Allison of Teleport City)

**Option Zero (Hong Kong, 1997: Dante Lam)** - *Option Zero* is a different take on the "special forces" cop squadron drama by focusing on the private lives of some of its key members, and how that affects their work in the field. Julian Cheng plays Ben, a member of the Hong Kong police's special duty officers who take down some more major crimes and figures. While they are tracking a Korean arms network, you get a glimpse into the relationships that develop between members of the group. When their head is killed, some of the members join an elite, private bodyguard company named G4. Things appear to come full circle when the Korean dealers come gunning for the men G4 are paid to protect.

Unfortunately I saw this film without seeing the first two installments of the "option" trilogy, and I'm not sure how that affected my enjoyment one way or the other. The script is well done and the characters are fleshed out quite significantly in a relatively short amount of time. Julian Cheng is quite wooden, but the other actors make up for him short-comings. Anthony Wong (looking grossly overweight) is good and the relationship with this wife makes for interesting scenes. I found Nancy Lan's character to be incredibly annoying and the cameo by Michael Wong was almost laughable as he tries way too hard to come off as suave and tough. The action scenes, although few in number, are of a very high quality and take no liberties in terms of bloodshed and brutality. Kudos to veteran Chin Kar Lok in this effort. Now I'll have to check out the first two to see how they compare to this enjoyable film. (by Gaijin84 of HKMDB)

**Organized Crime & Triad Bureau (Hong Kong, 1994: Kirk Wong)** - Watching this 1994 crime/police drama, one gets the sense that its director (Kirk Wong, who also helmed "Crime Story", "Rock and Roll Cop" and "Police Confidential") and producer cum star (Danny Lee, who is infamous in HK movie circles for wishing he really were a cop) meant for viewers of their film to sympathize with those of its characters who are officially on the right side of the law but do not hesitate to employ strong arm tactics to corner their criminal prey and make them pay for what wrong acts they have committed. However, I couldn't help but root for the most part for the nominal villains of the piece. This not least on account of the desperate -- for much of the movie -- duo portrayed by Anthony Wong and Cecilia Yip strongly coming across as nicer, more loyal and more caring folk than Inspector Lee (portrayed by guess who?) and his squad of bullies as well as just plain over-enthusiastic exponents of thoroughly rough justice.

It (also) does not help the fictionalized ORGANIZED CRIME & TRIAD BUREAU's case that the reason why Tung (Anthony Wong's character), Cindy (Cecilia Yip's) and the other members of their gang are so wanted by the police is not made explicit until fairly late into the film. By then, one has been made witness to the torture -- using such seemingly mundane items as perfume and wet towels along with various sections of the human body -- of some of the apprehended individuals by Inspector Lee's men (and one woman). This after the kind of massive and thorough manhunt that would seem to guarantee the dehumanization of the hunted individuals.

Despite having such troubled feelings and reactions, I have to confess to not being able to stop viewing ORGANIZED CRIME & TRIAD BUREAU all the way through to its very end (despite my originally planning to watch it over a couple of evenings). Although this seriously humorless -- and morally dubious -- offering has a simple storyline (which only really gets complicated by way of a couple of secondary characters turning out to have certain allegiances and debts that one wouldn't have thought that they would have), it manages to retain an air of suspense that really made me hanker to know what would happen next in the film and what would be the fates of each of the main characters.

ORGANIZED CRIME & TRIAD BUREAU ends with an extended action sequence which has people blasting away with shotguns and pistols that may not be greatly spectacular yet is still pretty exciting. Other notable segments of the movie include that which have Cindy softly crooning -- almost whispering -- a haunting song whose lyrics contain such lines as "Our love is as pure as snow...Trust each other, that's what love means..."; sometimes in precisely the kind of circumstances that one would think could really call into question the concept of love. In fact, those scenes actually touchingly reveal the strength of her and her -- married, but not to her... -- man's commitment to each other (as much as certain more loudly dramatic actions). A very nice -- and quiet, relative to the rest of the film -- moment that one would not expect to find in films of this nature involves the pleasure that water can give to two thirsty and dirty individuals.

This production is also distinguished by its possessing a number of cast members who may not be the biggest name stars of HK cinema but certainly can give performances which enhance a film's quality. All in all, I can't understand why Roy Cheung, Fan Siu Wong and the now retired Elizabeth Lee -- not just Cecilia Yip and Anthony Wong -- have not been accorded more recognition and adulation than they have. And re Parkman Wong (who played Inspector Lee's right hand man) and Li Fai (who played the hardly token female member of "Lee Sir"'s ORGANIZED CRIME & TRIAD BUREAU): Let me just say here that they are so convincing as dogged pursuers and rabid interrogators that they have succeeded in making me fear them in a way that thespians don't usually do. (by YTSL of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Other Side of the Sea, The (Hong Kong, 1994: Raymond Lee)** - Once again Michelle Reis takes on the character of a cold-blooded professional killer (*Black Morning Glory* being another). It's hard to imagine anyone looking less like a killer than the ravishing and pouty faced Michelle Reis – but I have to say she looks very chic whether thrusting a hairpin into a man's jugular or slashing a razor across a man's throat. And she can take a bullet as well as any professional killer can. I lost track of how often she gets wounded and keeps going – and killing – and still looking so beautiful.

It's a film that is a bit difficult to define – the first hour is generally very lyrical, gentle and character driven – but then in the final thirty minutes it turns into a killing ground – almost ludicrously so as the killing goes on and on. The first part is actually much better done from a cinematic perspective – poetic and refreshing – but I must say that as unrealistic, overly melodramatic and cheesy as the second part becomes – I enjoyed it more. There was just something about watching Michelle putting into action her version of population control that was quite fun – silly but fun.

Michelle shows up one sleepy summer day in a small slow paced fishing village on the island of Lantau. She is on the run, in hiding and recovering from betrayal and a shot to the stomach. She finds refuge in a small inn that is run by Vincent Wan – a sweet caring man – who quickly falls in love with Michelle. The days go by slowly and silently and Michelle recovers from both her physical and mental wounds and is eventually accepted by the village folk. In a few flashbacks her story is told. She grew up in wartime Vietnam – escaped to HK as a teenager – and found the only options available to her were to become a prostitute or become a killer. She chose the less painful one and joins a Murder Inc. type organization. After years of killing, she finally has had enough and decides to walk away from this world – but there is no walking away from that life – and they send a loved one to kill her.

Even on Lantau Island though her old life catches up with her and she returns to HK to try and get a passport so that she can leave. The killing begins. Lots of it. A seemingly endless supply of hitmen are sent after her (headed by Xiong Xin-Xin) and very few make it home for dinner. The streets of HK are littered with dead bodies but no one seems to really notice. Michelle is great – killing from every conceivable position – sliding backwards down some stairs, leaping into the ocean and while locked to a bed even manages to make it into a deadly weapon and kill a few people with it. Remember beds don't kill people – people do!

And it even gets more ridiculous – as Michelle once again retreats to that small town – finds solace in the arms of Vincent and then the killing begins again. An army of bad guys shuts down the entire town as they search for Michelle. The best cheesy part has to be when Michelle and Vincent find themselves surrounded by more gun toting men than at a NRA convention and both are bleeding profusely from more bullet holes than you want to count – and they begin whispering sweet nothings to one another. "So you are a killer. OK – so you have killed nearly 200 people in your life – OK in the last day or two – I still know you are a good person and I love you". It's that kind of movie. I just go with it and don't question the absurdity of it all. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Outlaw Brothers (Hong Kong, 1989: Frankie Chan)** - Mak Mok and Frankie Chan are professional car thieves who run into trouble when their criminal antics go too far.

*Outlaw Brothers* is widely touted as a first-class HK modern actioner. It has a healthy dose of action, most done at a pretty good speed, and of course there's the Jeff Falcon fight at the end which has quite a bit of style, but after watching it a couple times I didn't think the huge team of Yuen Shun Yi, Jackie Chan, Fong Hak On and Cheng Chi Ho (whoever that is) produced very good action.

The first part of the movie is a cool parking garage fight between Frankie Chan and a ton of security guards. Frankie seems limited in how he fights, though. I see many of his moves rehashed in *Oh Yes Sir!*, like the twisting backhand chops, the backfists to the back, and a lot of his blocks. The choreography looks good though, especially the first part against Fong Hak On which has a couple good looking bits of handwork, though the shots are far too short for how cool they could have been. A tracking shot of the two begins with some excellent action but after 3 moves it cuts. Too bad. Chan's fight against the security guards is weird, though. He almost seems too old-fashioned for this. Imagine all of Jackie Chan's stuntmen in a modern fight against Ti Lung; it just doesn't look right. Another problem I have with Frankie (at least in this fight) is the way he stops when the action is finished. It reminds me of Corey Yuen's choreography where a kick comes through and stays there, then \*bam next shot is something totally different. The jump is sometimes a little too drastic from the end of a shot to the beginning of the next. Chan pulls out a wooden broom that couldn't harm a fly but manages to scare off everyone. The choreography becomes decent, Frankie does the same generic swinging moves repeatedly and it ends with a cool stunt where 3 people fall off a moving car.

Max Mok's fight against the HK version of Don Wilson (all sweats) is fancy, maybe the best part of *Outlaw Brothers*. There's some obvious wushu in the opponent, and the handwork is jerky but complicated enough to keep interest. The shots are long too! It's a short scene, and Mok finishes off the guy with a surprisingly good looking jump back kick.

Yukari Oshima, who plays a cop, has a fight in a garage against a billion others. Oshima can be so inconsistent; she works miracles in movies like *Angel*, but sometimes she comes off as only flexible and coordinated. Here it's an uncomfortable mix. I think it's those shoes, like the ones Biao wears in *Iceman Cometh*. Sometimes her side kicks look like they just tap the other opponent, but then she'll bust out a hopping 4-kick combination. I don't get it. Overall she comes off as weak but quick. She goes against the wushu guy, which is very slow. And she kills him at the end! HK ludicracy: Kill all enemies!! Look out for the stunts here, though. There are three that are gruesome; a guy does a backfall onto the pavement off a car, Oshima's double does a half-spin onto the trunk, and at the end the boss does a suicide fall through a window 10 feet up onto the car hood down below. If *Outlaw Brothers* does one thing right, it's putting in mega stuntwork. Can't go wrong there.

Oshima and Frankie square off against another hoard of stuntmen. Some pretty basic kickboxing, Oshima does some kicking in slow motion and it looks bad. Frankie does his regular moves. The best part is the stuntwork involving people flying over balconies. Once they go down to the pool Oshima shows off good looking moves, showing her inconsistency again.

An insane stunt: two policemen ride up on motorcycles and hit the back of Nishiwaki's car. The one in the rear appears to smash his head into the rear window as his body keeps going over. The one in the rear gets more of a jump and lands nicely, but I wonder if the far biker was seriously injured. The window is broken in the next shot, which makes me think he cracked the window and Frankie said "Well, just break the whole window now." Poor guy. I write this paragraph in memory of his stunt!

One more incredible stunt I have to point out is when Frankie's double is hit by a sliding car. His legs go out and he flips over 270 degrees onto his stomach. INSANE. Who did that?

The end begins with something that I don't think HK or China will ever get over; blatant animal misuse. Two boxes filled with at least 400 chickens open up 100 feet above a concrete floor and they all pour out, some of them headless and bloody, some limping around, some convulsing from the impact. Fine, call me an animal rights activist or a tree hugger or a pussy, but don't call me a vegetarian; I enjoy chicken as much as anybody, but I don't think those few hundred chickens had any reason to be dumped onto concrete and destroyed. Later a car reams through the garage door and runs over maybe 10 of them, and explosion afterwards sends a few more twirling into the air. It's not funny, and it actually serves no purpose in the movie; it's utterly pointless. Thumbs down to the director (Frankie) for letting this happen.

Oshima fights Vincent Lyn and someone else in a narrow space around boxes. As far as I know Lyn never did anything more impressive than *Operation Condor*, and in this fight he's comes off as just another white guy, unfortunate considering how well he did in OC made only a year later. He has a couple kicking combinations that are edited too quickly to make sense, and the other guy does nothing remarkable. Oshima looks pretty good and does quick kicking, and afterwards goes to the ground and fights Swordsman Mark Houghton. Mark obviously knows what he's doing but, thanks to editing, we don't. Every shot has one move, and it's absurd. Then comes the Falcon portion. I've heard almost nothing but praise for this fight, but I really don't know why. Falcon moves fast and kicks high and his form is great, he does all this wushu fun stuff, and there are a couple of lengthy shots, but I can't get into the all-crescent-kick style and the super-fast editing with 2 moves per shot CONSTANTLY. He pulls out a fan and does some cool tricks (obvious Jackie Chan choreography here), throwing it around and catching it. After losing it to Oshima he tries out kickboxing unsuccessfully and, well, let's just say Falcon looks better doing wushu. Worst of all there are almost no stunts in this entire scene, a cardinal sin considering the sheer size of the location.

*Outlaw Brothers* was a disappointment on the second viewing. I think seeing any fast, modern HK action gives me the butterflies but when studied a little more carefully, it shows all its kinks. *Outlaw Brothers* has some good moments like the stunts and Max Mok's fight, but otherwise I find it inferior to *Oh Yes Sir!* in every way except quantity. Frankie's fighting style doesn't seem to work as well as in *Oh Yes Sir* where he appeared more formidable. Perhaps it's the group fighting. I wish Oshima had shown her colors a little more too. Max Mok was the only one who came off as 100% cool, so hats off to him. As for the rest, it's not bad if you want some modern stuff. (by Eric Jacobus of the Stunt People)

**Owl and Dumbo (Hong Kong, 1984: Sammo Hung) – aka Owl vs. Dumbo** - Sammo Hung's most sagacious period in his oeuvre for both local and transnational success was his string of comedic martial art infused fare in the 80s. Though comparing this to *Prodigal Son* is like comparing a Hyperion to a satyr (Hamlet anyone?). Up until this film I

didn't think he had a bad/mediocre 80s film. But this film was an audience smash though making over 21 million Hong Kong dollars made after his previous success *Wheels on Meals* that same year. No matter what I think of this film Sammo was in tune with his audience.

Many Hong Kong films mix genres haphazardly. Sometimes it will be broad comedy with brutal violence like *From Beijing with Love* or drama with out-of-place action scenes like *Heart of Dragon*. This film does something a bit different: it interjects the broad martial arts comedy with societal message that is more akin to certain western fare (*On Deadly Ground* or *The Great Dictator*) with long harangues of dramatic passages that feel so out of place that you wonder what is trying to be accomplished. There were also uneven in tone: one actually was quite good of a kid explaining the difficulties of being a son of a prostitute and one was tedious as a female teenage prostitute brings Michelle's character to tears in a most annoying didactic speech.

There is also the problem that many Hong Kong films do during this era -- stealing scores from other films. Some of this musical soundtrack is from *Phantasm* and *Escape From New York*.

Owl is the sophisticated George Lam Chi-cheung (first time I have even seen this singer act but his acting is quite natural even in bizarre situations; he also was nominated for a Hong Kong award for Best Original Song from this film) and Bombo is the unrefined Sammo Hung (aka Dumbo or Bumbo depending on which translation is used; I think there was just some issue or fear with the legality of using the Disney's character name outside of Hong Kong) two ex-thieves who are being blackmailed by an ex-cop Fung (Stanley Fung: *Winners and Sinners*) to do two jobs or else have there past paraded to cops for potential life employment in the big house. Their first job is to help troubled kids at a youth center. Why? I have no idea. I have read one review stating that it is to see if they work together so they can pull off the second job, but nothing in what I saw (and several other reviews I have read have had the same problem) shows that. Plus the second job happens quite quickly and is really just there to set up the ending with Au Gun (James Tien: *Fearless Hyena*) once again playing a cigar chomping bad guy.

There is also a romantic sub-plot that is thrown in between Owl and Ms. Yeung and Bumbo and Joyce Leung (Deannie Yip: *Pom Pom*) who is the superintendent of the school. The owl relationship seems too contrived, but the one between Sammo and Deannie works out decently (of course Sammo is the director).

However, there are some great scenes in this film. Sammo Hung has a great scene as a tights wearing aerobic instructor and throughout the film he shows despite his rotund exterior he can flip, fight and astound me with his physical virtuosity. In fact one scene (out of nowhere) he puts on a montage of Fred Astaire dance moves (or Fred Astaire inspired; I recognize a few but not all the routines Sammo does) that is quite good and ends with a nice little duet with Deannie. There is another homage to *From Soup To Nuts* (1928), a short with Laurel and Hardy though Anita Garvin does the gag in that movie, dealing with an errant cherry and a spoon. The fighting is quite good even if you recognize that George Lam is doubled constantly, and the abuse of stuntmen is prevalent in those scenes. Though I think fans of Sammo Hung would probably want more comedy and more action than what you find in this film.

This is Michelle Yeoh's first film (I do not think she knew Cantonese that well at this point though) and she does no fighting and seems a bit out-of-place though it does make sense if you know that she would later marry the founder of the production company behind this film D & B's Dickson Poon (and later divorce him). She has even stated this film was an impetus for her to get into action since "...I saw the men having all the fun doing the action scenes and I wanted to do that too." (*City on Fire* Stokes/Hoover)

And way at the bottom of this review I will state that there is a great esoteric in-joke with Fung Ging-man (an elderly man who has acted in hundreds of Hong Kong films) and his clothing attire that cannot be explained unless you know what I am talking about.

The Universe R0 DVD I own is an OK DVD though out-of-print. The print quality is decent. The English subtitles are many times quite hilarious with their grammatical errors and bizarre use of the language. However, both Mandarin and Cantonese audios are on here. It has a trailer for this film as well as a non-subtitled "*Where's Officer Tuba* (1986)" also starring Sammo Hung. There are currently no R1 DVDs of this film. (by Masterofoneinchpunch of KFF)

**Pantyhose Hero (Hong Kong, 1990: Sammo Hung)** Sammo and Alan go undercover as homosexuals to uncover a murderer and run into various problems along the way.

Considered by many as a politically incorrect film, I thought it very entertaining. To begin with, Sammo's men ALWAYS have giant levels of testosterone, even Sammo himself is always sneaking a peek under a skirt or something. They do it over and over in this. The gay men in the movie are the same way with the other men, sometimes they're actually not half as bad as Sammo's typical super male character. So to say Sammo was attacking homosexuals would be the same as saying he attacked heterosexuals, however we all know that both sides of Sammo's comedy (the super-sex-charged hetero and homosexual males) are very extreme. Neither are totally true. At least he does both sides of the argument. Had he been the type to never expose the super-sex portion of the heterosexual male and then proceed to blatantly stereotype homosexuals, I have to say this would be a big piece of propaganda. But just look at it from Sammo's hormone-driven male stance and I think you'll enjoy the humor greatly.

The action is awesome. If any of you like the editing and camerawork in *Pedicab Driver* you'll love this, it's almost exactly the same in style. At times it actually seems faster than *Pedicab*. A few group fights, and then Sammo and Alan have an end fight, which is good as well.

Sammo starts things off in a shack (mind the terrible quality of the pics, this is another Black Dragon video, copied and so jumpy at times I almost shut it off) against the likes of Chung Fa and a few others. Fast, that's all I can say. Alan comes along and his attacks don't carry half the weight of Sammo's. Sammo has some nice moves, and this is a brutal fight with chain link fences, chainsaws, shovels and crowbars. Nasty stuff. Probably the worst fight in the movie and it's very good. That should tell you something.

Sammo faces a gang of guys outside and takes them all out. Very fast, even faster than the last scene. Some 4 men try to toss Sammo around and do a little but Sammo recovers quickly, send them all to the ground and walk off. It doesn't stop, one guy chases Sammo onto a car and they throw punches blazingly fast and next thing you know the man is down. Right after that, Sammo (or whoever this psycho was) gets hit by a car in what I might consider the craziest stunt I've ever seen in an HK film. It's not a standard hit and roll over, but he flies up, hits the TOP of the windshield, breaks it, and flies off without even touching the car on the way out. Anyone who sees this will freak I guarantee it, you'd think the guy was a ham sandwich the way his body wobbled after the impact. Furious scene altogether! Great stuff! You'll notice some of the editing is super fast and very easy to follow at the same time, with dynamic camera angles that capture everything necessary. This is about a minute and a half long total.

Sammo gets in a similar brawl in a restaurant, which is equally good except it's only 13 seconds, though the way it goes you'll consider it a full fight because so much happens. Sammo wipes out 4 or 5 men in this time frame so quickly, throwing the last one across the room by his leg ala *Pedicab*, and fighting some others 3 at a time. Just awesome, must be seen to be believed.

Sammo, again, gets attacked this time by a single man armed with a knife, who does some spectacular falls and the choreography, as expected, is great, while amazingly simple. The bad guy has a big knife and Sammo does a lot of defensive work, some acrobatically (perfectly done, rolling over a bar table, stuff like that), using a pan, some joint locking, and throwing the guy through glass everywhere. Very intense, and the slomo is done so well, just like (again) *Pedicab Driver*. Time of this fight is around 2 minutes, and the camerawork and editing are perfect.

The finale begins with the same guy as the last fight attacking Sammo while he is tied up. Not a whole lot happens, but Sammo has some nice kicks, a little stunt with a big spool (which he's tied to), and a that's it, but it has the same speed as the other fights.

The finale is a little disappointing compared to the rest of the movie, but still it's not half bad and it's very high powered. First Sammo and Alan take on the whole crowd. I won't bother mentioning Alan's fighting because I don't think many care about it, he's generally very weak and fights by swinging around a shovel, so it didn't interest me, but his double did a kick or two that were good. Sammo fights off a few using a metal beam, which is so fast and it's clear Sammo picked people who could really use staffs, some cuts here are longer than the normal one in this movie. Next he takes one man in green who doesn't look like a real fighter but they do some short good handwork, and the guy's double does a back 3/4 with his legs split, and totally smashes his groin into the corner of a wall (you know, the 90 degree section where 2 walls connect). Terribly painful. Finally, the last guy comes, which was unexpected because I read somewhere he was Japanese, but he's not, he's just the boss from early on in the movie who was kind of funny looking, but his legs aren't funny. He's a great fighter and has mean kicks. Once he does a double bike kick followed by a high kick to Sammo's face, and then lands. A few small fast punching exchanges, more kicks, Sammo does a few falls, and then breaks through a pit covered with wooden beams, brutal. The bad guy is shot and then Sammo slams him once with a pretty rugged weapon.

I was a bit disappointed that the fight between Sammo and the kicker was very short, less than 2 minutes and a lot of it was standoff. But the entire movie had great action, very worthy of a Sammo collection. All the action was great, the comedy was hilarious, and the whole package was worth my money, though I got it from [www.blackdragonvideo.com](http://www.blackdragonvideo.com) and I don't suggest buying from them, some parts of the tape were unwatchable. Editing and camera buffs, check this out too, lots to learn about how to do fast action. (by Eric Jacobus of the Stunt People)

**Paper Marriage (Hong Kong, 1988: Sammo Hung)** - Chinese title: 過埠新娘 roughly means Passport Bride. There is another Hong Kong film with the same title from Shaw Brothers in 1959. That film was a reworking of Hollywood's *Waterloo Bridge* (1940).

"Sex maniacs, porno representatives. I'm excited to see you"

Romantic comedies are generally a pretty predictable subgenre of films. There are certainly some good ones out there like *When Harry Met Sally* (1989), *Say Anything* (1989) though most tend to be middling affairs that follow some very basic pattern like boy meets girl (usually through a "meet cute"), boy almost woos girl, boy does something stupid to upset girl, boy must have dramatic scene in last act sometimes involving Peter Gabriel music to win back girl. Here we have a scenario where the entire plot is based on getting two unlikely people together: a needed green card (done earlier in *Come Live with Me* (1941), and done later in *Green Card* (1990) and *The Proposal* (2009).) Hilariously this is supposed to be taking place in Los Angeles. However, they go the races at the Northlands in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, Frank Lee's Martial Arts Studio is in Edmonton and even more hilarious is the famous West Edmonton Mall.

Bo Chin (Sammo Hung) needs money after losing at the horse races, his current alimony to his ex-wife (real life future wife Joyce Godenzi) and previously owing money to low level gangsters whose Hawaiian shirts and sunglasses make them look like they were rejected from the casting call of Magnum P.I. He is a misogynist curmudgeon who never takes a bath and, of course, will be redeemable by the end of the film (I do not know about the bath thing though.) He takes a job as an acupuncture guinea pig. Do not expect it to go well. Off to Frank Lee's Martial Arts studio where he visits Uncle Tsai (Frank Lee). Tsai does not give him great hope for money as Chin is a shell of his former kickboxing self but does give him an idea. A sham marriage which he whispers into his ear which makes absolutely no sense because there is no one in the room. Meanwhile Jade Lee (Maggie Cheung) is leaving Hong Kong for the United States to be with her boyfriend Peter (Alfred Cheung who also happens to be the director) who is more interested in her money than her. He wants her to be part of a fake marriage. We know who with.

Unfortunately Peter takes off with the money putting both Jade and Bo into a bad situation. They need money. They get some as a couple for the same Psychological Research center proving that women can take more punishment than men. But still not enough. Bo has to get back into fighting, eventually having a match with his wife's new beau (Billy Chow) and Jade decides to try her hand at mud wrestling. Now she can get 2000 dollars per mud wrestling match. That is crazy unless they were thinking Hong Kong dollars. I would do that (either American or Hong Kong dollars or a free cup of tea.)

But the last act (or I think we need to pad more time to the film and involve some action sequences) takes the film into even more worn territory plot wise as it includes the "getting the wrong suitcase/duffel bag/satchel switcheroo" scenario. How this happens strains any sense of credibility, but try not to think about it. The two end up with a lot of money they have dreamed about, but like the duffel bag in *No Country for Old Men* that baggage comes with a price. But here for most of us viewers the fun begins, especially when Dick Wei shows up in his *Miami Vice* couture. Then the film is fight and stunt bliss, especially in the West Edmonton Mall. Though I am rooting for Dick Wei strictly because of his attire, that and being the former head of the Venoms Clan.

Action aficionados might be disappointed by the straight-up boxing match between Phillip Ko and Hung. It is a bit weird. Ko has trouble throwing a legitimately looking jab and cross. It just looks awkward. You can see him push the arm instead of snapping it across and his balance is off. This is probably why it is filmed too close up. They also make the big mistake of going slow-motion after a bad punch. Never do this it exaggerates the poorly delivered hit. This is not a particular high point in either of their fight choreographies. The mud wrestling match is pretty much a squash. But the ringed kickboxing match between Hung and Billy Chow does fare better. Now I do not think Hung would ever win that type of match with Chow with him being a kickboxing champion and still competing at the time of the filming, but it does look a lot better than the one with Ko. Chow was trained by Frank Lee at the time and, of course, was in Edmonton at the time. He impressed Sammo Hung in this which helped lead to bigger and better roles (or at least more acting jobs) like *Fist of Legend*.\* But the last act is the strongest with action. There are a couple of nice stunts, especially the fall through the glass, bouncing off an awning and then not bouncing off the ground for one stunt man. You get a nice showing of Billy Chow versus the late real-life kickboxer Tony Morelli and much more.

Overall the movie is pleasant enough. Some of the funniest scenes involve the guinea pig research. The action is sporadic, sometimes bad, and sometimes really good. In the filmography of Sammo Hung it is filler. It does not reach the lows of his later films like *Don't Give a Damn*, but I do not think many will prefer this to *Dragon's Forever* or *Pedicab Driver*. But to be fair I do not know the filmography of the director Alfred Cheung that well. Too much of the plot is cliché as it revolves around a "Green Card" angle and then a "mistaken baggage" subplot. But you could probably get away with watching this or *Heroes of the East* with your non-martial arts supporting significant other. Especially if they have forced you to watch too many romantic comedies. The horror, the horror.

I viewed this on the Universe R0/NTSC DVD release. It has decent English subtitles along with Chinese Traditional, Chinese Simplified and Bahasa. There are two audit tracks: Mandarin and Cantonese (my preferred for this.) There is the Trailer and More Attractions (*Where's Officer Tuba; Shanghai, Shanghai; The Owl vs Bombo*).

\* Now if you are looking at release dates this statement may confuse you. The film was released in 1988, but filmed in 1986 (I am not sure why the delay.) Billy Chow had done a couple of roles before, but this was a big break because it led to Sammo Hung hiring him again which then lead to more work. (by Master of One-Inch Punch of KFF)

**Passionate Killing in the Dream (Hong Kong, 1992: Parkman Wong)** - Set in Thailand, the central character is an emotionally vulnerable female fashion photographer whose vivid dreams about a serial killer eventually provoke his unwelcome attention. Michiko's character "Sha-Sha Lee" is more subdued and conventional than usual. She does a competent job as the star of this drama, effectively conveying the terrifying destabilization caused by her nightmarish visions that eventually become reality. Unfortunately, the depth and relative subtlety of her performance is offset by a wholly unnecessary romance – with her psychologist! If this had been portrayed as an inappropriate, clandestine liaison prompted by her unraveling sanity, the film might have been considerably enhanced. However, it seems just an excuse to subordinate the female lead to male direction, with some travel scenes of their vacation thrown in! The usual elements of mild farce are also distracting.

On the positive side is an unexpectedly strong performance from the main female supporting actor who plays "Catherine," the director of a fashion show for which Michiko is shooting publicity stills. Catherine is a lesbian who is pampered by her models and assistants. She makes a play for Michiko, admiring her physique. She's also a proficient martial artist, and when she drunkenly persuades Michiko to accompany her on a continuing binge in an open-air café, Catherine quickly picks a fight with some leering young men. In one of the film's best scenes Michiko and she demolish the opposition, Catherine alternately staggering and fighting. She eggs Michiko on, screaming at her to kill the men. Sha-Sha is visibly put out, and brusquely rejects her.

The other major pillar supporting the plot is the serial killer, played with considerable sophistication by Gordon Liu. Flashbacks show his childhood exposure to poverty and family violence, as his mother's drunken partner hurls him down the stairs of their hut. His adult efforts to succeed as a muay Thai boxer are cut short in matches where he is brutally beaten with tonfas. Beaten, scared, scarred, and preoccupied with his unmet childhood needs, he develops a pattern of savage lust murders of attractive women – especially those who reject him. At knifepoint he courts them, leading them through a ghoulish ritual. This portrayal is actually quite sophisticated in its interweaving of past trauma and current preoccupation with efforts to prove self-worth. Again, it is unfortunate that the character of the psychologist, "Alex Ha," was not used to more effect.

As Sha-Sha attempts to visualize the killer in her waking state, her efforts are cynically revealed by the police in an effort to lure the killer out. He obliges, and confronts Michiko at her home after she has taken a sleeping pill – thanks to the psychologist's suggestion. She'd have been a lot better off without him! This fight is extremely well done, blending the killer's ritual and Michiko's sedative-impaired efforts to disrupt it. The distinctive musical melody that forms part of the killer's routine as he dances with his terrified victims remains vivid long after the final credits. This is definitely one of Michiko's strongest parts. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Peace Hotel (Hong Kong, 1995: Wai Ka-Fei)** - Chow Yun Fat's final HK film before departing for Hollywood is an extremely interesting effort that has been met with a lot of resistance from HK film fans. Many find it too oblique, too dark, too disjointed and the characters too under developed. To some degree I can't disagree with these assessments, but at the same time I found this to be a beautifully constructed film that is all about mythmaking. It's almost as if the director Wai Ka-Fai took the character from *The Killer* (John Woo is the producer of *Peace Hotel*) and transposes him to a different time and notches up even more the legendary aura surrounding him.



This fits of course into the very Western (as a genre) feel that this film has. There are themes in this film that are found time after time in the Hollywood Westerns of the 1940's and 50's. Individuality, searching for identity, a man left on his own to face the bad guys, the now peaceful man who has to once again pick up his gun to protect society are themes that run through many Westerns and are very present here. There are strong echoes of *High Noon* and *Shane* (even telling the story from the point of view of a small boy) that resonate through this film. And like the Westerns of John Wayne, Gary Cooper, Alan Ladd and Joel McCrea this film is about creating a myth – not simply telling a story – about a man much bigger and larger than life. Taken from the eyes of a small boy told many years later, it has taken on the characteristics of a “tall tale” – to be passed down from generation to generation – and with each telling becomes more exaggerated. I approached the film from this perspective and found it to be immensely satisfying.

There are a number of cinematic techniques that I really enjoyed about this film as well. The editing is simply brilliant, the lilting music weaves into the story line seamlessly (the three man band is a great touch), the tint that Wai gives the film is just perfect (it places the viewer in different space, a different era - and again gives off echoes of old time Westerns) and his use of the camera – at times creating a claustrophobic sense within the Hotel, at other times it feels cavernous depending on what mood he is trying to project – and his coming in for close ups and then backing away for widescreen shots is a pleasure to watch.

Though John Woo produces the film, one should not have expectations of John Woo like action. The film has action at the beginning and the end of the film (which is in fact seemingly much more influenced by Wong Kar-Wai than Woo). The remainder of the film is about this man, his hotel, the woman who enters it and the relationship that grows between the two of them. The film explores themes of identity, memory, community, revenge, sacrifice and love.

In the opening scene, Chow Yun Fat – called interestingly The Killer – is in the process of slaughtering a large number of men – and he sees his lover (a cameo from the glorious Wu Chien-lien) die in front of him. It isn't until much later in the film that the truth of what transpired that day becomes clear. After the bloody massacre, a sickened Chow retires from a life of killing and opens a hotel in the wastelands in which anyone can receive refuge - no questions asked. No one is allowed to violate this sanctuary or they will answer to Chow. Over ten years a community has grown up within the hotel and as long as they stay within they are safe. Allusions to HK? – perhaps.

One day Cecilia Yip comes into the sanctuary seeking escape from a large group of ruffians and claiming to be Chow's dead wife at one point and one of the Soong sisters at another. Her performance is vibrant, enchanting and multi-faceted. Who she really is slowly surfaces over the film. The large band of killers gives Chow a deadline for turning her over to them – or they will kill everyone within.

**Peacock King, The (Hong Kong, 1989: Lam Nai-Choi)** - Hell Holes are beginning to open up in present day Tokyo and Hong Kong and as you might guess this is not good news! The Hell King has been asleep and imprisoned for one thousand years, but this is a clear sign that he is active once again and that his servants will soon be travelling the earth. Once the fourth Hell Hole opens the Hell King will reappear and unless stopped, dominate the earth! Fortunately, there is help on the way. Where there is evil, there is always good!

Two young Buddhist priests – Peacock (Yuen Biao) and Lucky Fruit (Hiroshi Mikami) have been told by their respective sifu's (Eddie Ko/Ken Ogata) about the imminent danger and that only they have the power to stop the Hell King. Both oddly accept this proclamation without question and both show up in Tokyo to battle evil. Evil comes in the lovely form of the sexy and slinky Pauline Wong and the cherubic, but shapely Gloria Yip (in her film debut). Yip is Ashura, the virgin daughter of the Hell King and she is quite the hottie in her tight leather red body-fitting outfit!

The film is an interesting if not wholly satisfying film from Yuen who also gets partial credit for helping direct it along with Lam Nai-Choi (*The Seventh Curse*). Rather than the expected martial arts film from Yuen, he goes off in a completely different direction and creates a supernatural film that is chock full of special effects. With the exception of one nicely choreographed fight against Gordon Liu and his band of killer monks, there is very little fighting. One of course expects wonderful acrobatics and martial arts from Yuen Biao and my first reaction was disappointment. I kept waiting for some classic Yuen flips and twists and they never really materialize.

On the other hand, the special effects are quite fun and the set designs are really visually quite terrific. Sure the special effects are a bit cheesy as one has come to expect from HK films – but they are imaginative and enjoyable to watch. Some of the special effects are your basic green/red eerie lights, fiery balls of explosion and so forth – but

there are also these delightful little creatures that are a bit gremlin like, a dinosaur that comes to life and Pauline Wong metamorphasizing - body splitting type of thing – into a horrific slimy monster.

At any rate Yuen and Hiroshi meet up in a Tokyo department store where they pick up Narumi Yasuda as an assistant (this was a Japanese/HK production) and decide to ally themselves to fight the Hell King. Ashura turns out to be your basic teenager with identity problems – its not easy being the Virgin Hell daughter – like many teenagers she is just keeping bad company. She is just a girl that wants to have a little fun after being down in Hell for quite a while and who can blame her! Yuen is suppose to kill her – you do that sort of thing with daughters of the Hell King - but as I mentioned she is a hottie – even when she goes all bug-eyed and scary looking – and Yuen thinks better of it. Eventually, the Hell King shows up looking a bit like a gigantic Mr Clean and I just thought to myself – why would he even want to take over the earth – what would be the point - he is way too big to enjoy himself here.

Taken on its own this is not a bad film – not a lot of dramatic impact I have to say – there is never a lot of doubt that good will overcome evil – but its decent light entertainment. Looking at it though from the perspective of a Yuen Biao film though, there is a real feeling of a lost opportunity. Yuen didn't make that many films – so why make one like this I wonder. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Pedicab Driver (Hong Kong, 1989: Sammo Hung)** - Before coming into this film, I expected to love it. What I didn't expect was to love it as much as I do, so much so that I'm willing to consider it probably my new favourite martial arts film. Here are a few words on why:

First and foremost, *Pedicab Driver* is actually really well directed. Many of these martial arts actors turned directors don't really have much in the way of directorial skill, but they do know exactly what they want to show on screen so the camerawork tends to be very functional (which I should add is better than what most directors can claim). Sammo Hung isn't exactly an exception when it comes to directing, but what he lacks in creativity with the camera, he makes up for in dramatic chops and pure heart. There are many establishing shots giving us a great view of the location and time period while the people that inhabit the film give it that extra flavour. *Pedicab Driver* is a love letter to the genre we all know and love and Hung makes sure to allow us to cherish every detail from the food stalls littering the streets, the pedicabs whizzing through the town, and the whimsical soundtrack that only beckons us to stay. The film starts off as a martial arts romantic comedy about the lives of two friends who are desperate for love, but it very quickly turns around and starts to explore the dark underbelly of prostitution and the implications it has for society and the people involved.

And I think I probably don't need to mention this, but the fights are absolutely stunning. As with all Hung films, the choreography is fast, flashy and mixes brutality with light hearted flourishes. A standout fight is actually one that is totally irrelevant to the plot, but sees an extended cameo from Lau Kar-Leung who fights Hung in what is possibly one of the best choreographed fights to ever be put to screen. Any description I could give wouldn't do this fight justice, but I love the fact that many of these older martial arts films would gladly sidetrack the narrative just to get a fight in, even if it served no purpose beyond spectacle. Unfortunately the fights never quite get as great this irrelevant one, but due to the added stakes of each subsequent fight, you'll feel yourself rooting for the good guys so hard that you'll have a hard time sitting while watching. At least this is what happened to me.

This brings us to the dramatic chops I mentioned earlier. While I'm sure the main purpose of this film, like most martial arts films of the time, was to show off some beautifully choreographed fights, what sets this far above most is the fact that the drama actually works. It isn't just good drama for a martial arts film, but even if you removed the martial arts from the film, it'd still work as a good drama. While it does tend to fall into melodramatic bouts, the emotions that are felt are totally heart warming and heart breaking. In the more tragic relationship of the two, it's the little moments that count - Max Mok staring at Fennie Yuen in the reflection of his pedicab mirror, Mok throwing a tarp over his pedicabs hood to plug a hole that has water leaking onto Yuen - when the reality catches up to them, the tragedy just hits that much harder.

Of course this wouldn't be a Hung film without some of his usual light hearted humour. I love that the occasional scene that should be dark and dramatic is handled with a light hearted touch. Some of these scenes, if handled by a different director like John Woo, would stoop so far into melodrama that it would just feel ridiculous. The light heartedness gives it just enough levity to prevent the drama from becoming overwrought, but not enough to completely overwrite the scenes purpose. One such scene sees our four main guys attempting to force Yuens into saying she wants to marry Moks character with the usual "if you don't say it, I guess we'll have to take him away" shtick. A scene that follows shows all the friends sell their pedicabs to pay for the wedding. While much of this is done in a humorous manner, Hung makes sure that it all serves a purpose and it only serves to strengthen the bonds between these best friends.

To summarise, *Pedicab Driver* isn't just a great martial arts film, it's also a great film full stop. It's a film about friendship, love, life and our ultimate reality. It's a tragedy, but it's also optimistic. It's a great change of pace from the usual martial arts film only concerned with spectacle. In a recent interview with Hung, he mentioned that he probably had the chance to work with maybe only four or five great scripts as a director. I'm gonna go ahead and assume that this is one of them because it is damn great. (by Writ of KFF)

**Peking Opera Blues (Hong Kong, 1986: Tsui Hark)** - There are movies that you beforehand know are masterpieces and turn out to be just that. Then there are movies like Tsui Hark's *Peking Opera Blues* which have received praise in EVERY review I've read. In the end some praised movies end in disappointment and for me this was one.

The story takes place in 1913 where three women with totally different backgrounds must stop the fall of democracy at hands of conspiring warlords. Tsao Wan (Brigitte Lin from *Dream Lovers*) is the one leading the mission to obtain a vital document and she has to go against her father, General Tsao (played by Kenneth Tsang from *Anna and The King*), to defend the republic. Pat Neil (Sally Yeh from *The Killer*) is an aspiring opera actress that get dragged into the hunt and Sheung Hung's (Cherie Cheung from *Wild Search*) only goal is to get back the jewelry box she once stole...

It really feels like I'm in minority regarding my thoughts of *Peking Opera Blues* but before we go into why let me just say that I didn't hate this movie, it's just wasn't the masterpiece I expected it to be. First let's talk a little bit about our director Tsui Hark. His place in Hong Kong cinema history is long since cemented after influential directorial efforts such as *Zu: Warriors From The Magic Mountain* and *Once Upon A Time In China*. He has also produced even more influential works like *A Better Tomorrow* and *The Killer* and recently fired on all visual cylinders in *Legend Of Zu* (a movie I quite enjoyed). So with all those works behind him, no one can claim Tsui Hark is not good at what he does. *Peking Opera Blues* does not lack the elements for a terrific movie. It's beautifully photographed, costume- and set design are well above average for a period piece and Ching Siu-Tung's action choreography is creative and exciting. So what's wrong here then?

In Hong Kong movies we can live, at times, with a less than coherent plot and while this movie actually has a good plot, it's never made interesting in combination with other aspects. I think that To Kwok Wai consciously choose to let the plot and character take their time to get together, something I didn't find annoying at all. The story was already moving forward at a good pace and the team behind and in front of the camera carried the movie nicely. When we eventually get the plot and characters sorted out the movie never truly elevate itself to greatness. The whole time I was waiting for the thing to blow me away but that feeling never came. Everything just halts and remains ok despite the fact that there is always something happening in Tsui Hark's frame. It's either that the elements are perfect in the script and never fully done justice to by the director or the weaknesses were there to begin with. It's hard to tell but I could be a combination of both.

To Kwok Wai's screenplay jumps freely between the different moods without any shame whatsoever and that is also an element that made Hong Kong movies so fun to watch at this point in time. The comedy in *Peking Opera Blues* is often very funny and well-timed, especially in the opera performance-scenes. The innuendos that occur on stage are handled well by all actors involved and they do look prepared timing wise, therefore creating some genuine laugh out loud moments. The comedic timing of the cast reaches it's high point when Sally Yeh is trying to hide her friends from her father (Wu Ma). The drama that is injected here and there throughout the movie falls rather flat though. Despite that we know the characters pretty well and like our three leading ladies, Tsui doesn't manage to bring out the emotions he's aiming for. John Woo for example always did this masterfully but Tsui Hark gets stuck with one foot in the swamp of clichés. I just didn't care or feel sorry for them, which I should've considering what I as a viewer had experienced with them.

The biggest star of this show has to be the work by action choreographer Ching Siu-Tung (director of *A Chinese Ghost Story* and the upcoming *Naked Weapon*). Here his and Tsui Hark's imagination are nicely combined into scenes with gunplay, crazy stunts and first rate excitement. I really enjoyed the inspiring camerawork in these scenes but it makes one miss what great stuff we used to see in Hong Kong movies. Ching Siu-Tung is a reliable man to have on your project and kudos to him for making a dork like Mark Cheng look good with guns in his hands. Definitely the highlight of the movie and these are scenes you could watch over and over again outside of the actual movie. I won't ruin anything for you but the climax is simply awesome and it's one I will watch again before I pass on the dvd.

*Peking Opera Blues* is literally filled with stars starting with our leading ladies and fan favourites from many movies of this era. As mentioned, in the script all the characters never truly come to life and Tsui has apparent problems directing them to life also. Have to say that neither cast member does a bad job though and leading the pack is one

of my favourite actresses from this era, Brigitte Lin. She again shows that she was good at her craft while she was working and the conflicts and the courage within her character is probably one thing To Kwok Wai pulled off the best in the writing stage. Sally Yeh gets weak material to work with since her journey and character arc is never made clear enough but Cherie Cheung shows great comedic range and is a delight to follow throughout the movie. It's not often I have fun watching almost typical Cantonese humour but under Tsui Hark's guidance Cherie puts in a memorable performance. Supporting players include, the almost always bad, Mark Cheng, often bad guy actor Kenneth Tsang and the always wonderful Wu Ma.

*Peking Opera Blues* is not a bad film but not the masterpiece I thought it was going to be and the elements that have been highly praised in reviews, I thought were done ok. It wasn't easy not to set the bar high with this movie but in the end it turned out to be a fairly exciting action-comedy. You hear that some movies may grow on you during a second viewing but I wouldn't want to watch this again to see if it's true. Maybe I'll pick up the future Hong Kong Legends dvd to judge *Peking Opera Blues* once again. (by Kenneth Brorsson of So good Reviews)

**Pink Bomb (Hong Kong, 1993: Derek Chiu)** - For some reason I was expecting a wild over the top 'girls with guns' bloodfest, but this turned out to be a very mild comedic effort with a little bit of action thrown in. It is not a particularly well made film – but it has a charm that I somewhat enjoyed. After a while I stopped worrying about the lack of gunplay and just got into the swing of this fun, silly little film.

Waise Lee is a tour leader and he is organizing his little group of five clients to go on a tour of Thailand. To better get to know one another, he asks them to stand up and tell an embarrassing story about themselves. I would describe his own as being a little more than just embarrassing. He is a Christian, he relates, and when he was baptized his fear of water made him panic and he accidentally drowned the minister. This is all shown in a flashback. Not exactly the kind of story I would tell about myself to a group of people that you are taking on a tour! But it sets the mood for this film.

The tour members are Cynthia Khan – a traffic cop trying out for the Olympics, Loletta Lee – a teacher, Fennie Yuen – a cosmetician, Lau Ching-Wan – a taxi driver with a Travis Bickle complex and finally Dayo Wong who is very depressed because his triad has just kicked him out for being too darn nice.

Off this crazy crew goes to Thailand where in Bangkok they immediately bump into a Thai prostitute – the adorable Gloria Yip – who claims to be a virgin for sale. Later some guy takes her up on it, but the whole thing is a scam as her partner disguised as a cop breaks into the room and accuses the guy of having sex with a 14-year old. Wrong guy to pull the stunt on. He turns out to be some bad guy with a suitcase full of phony money. The tour group gets involved in the ensuing fracas and in the outcome little Gloria ends up with all the money. She talks the group into taking her along to see her mother and to get away from this “bad life”. They are all unaware that she is sitting on mobster's money.

In no time, the bad guys are chasing after them from Pattaya to Chang Mai. We get to see some Thai landmarks along the way, but not a lot of action. Cynthia Khan does thankfully get to throw a few punches and some leg kicks. It is really the goofy chemistry that develops between the tour members that becomes the main pleasure of this film. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Pink Force Commando (Taiwan, 1982: Kevin Chu Yen-Ping)** - If there's one question I'm dying to ask Brigitte Lin Ching-Hsia, it's not "will you ever appear in a film again?", "how was it like to play Asia the Invincible?" or even "have you ever directed THE glare at your husband and/or children?" Instead, I'd love to know what possessed her to agree to grace more than one -- maybe even five -- of Chu Yen Ping's really weird as well as indisputably baaaaad movies (and, relatedly, how the Taiwanese screen goddess and her fellow cast members managed NOT to dissolve into hysterical laughter when doing whatever they were asked to do by that demented -- if not permanently hallucinogenically drugged out -- director).

PINK FORCE COMMANDO puts the woman who went by the name of Venus Lin during this frankly odd portion of her twenty year career in the thick of: First, a bid to acquire a stash of stolen and hidden gold; then a quest for an impossibly large diamond; followed by attempts to acquire a valuable map and counter-attempts to prevent it from falling into the wrong (i.e., foreign) hands. For a while, the viewer is witness to a slew of fancy-dressed and -named folk appearing to pop up in all sorts of odd places (e.g., a beach, a casino) and engage in what seem like random fights (E.g., Sally Yeh plays a dynamite expert called Mascot who decimates what look like a bunch of characters -- including a Bruce Lee imitator and a Buddhist monk -- who have escaped from your stereotypical 1970s era kungfu movies a few seconds after they accidentally awaken her from her open-air slumber). Over the course of various

and varied proceedings though, the good guys and (mainly) gals get distinguished from the evil characters by their turning out to possess patriotic and loyal as well as heroic streaks under their mercenary and materialistic tendencies.

...At least this is what I THINK I can determine as occurred in this truly bizarre film! To be sure, PINK FORCE COMMANDO seems to have a more coherent and straightforward plot than "Fantasy Mission Force" and "Golden Queen Commando" (AKA "Amazon Commando" and hawked by Xenon as "Jackie Chan's Crime Force"). However, anyone who knows anything about those two seriously surreal as well as hyper silly offerings -- which definitely share certain stylistic and budget limitations affinities with this one (not least that of their characters looking like they were costumed to appear in a whole bunch of different period movies) -- will understand that this really is not saying much at all.

Alternatively, what is undeniable for this (re)viewer is that Brigitte Lin steals the show as Jackal: Who early on betrays her all female gang for a not particularly attractive betelnut-chewing and -juice-spitting love, and life as a rich and luxuriously attired woman; but redeems herself during an emotional re-encounter with a couple of her once (and future) comrades by cutting off her left arm with a samurai sword as penance for letting a man lead her astray. I must admit that the strangely amusing descriptions of this woman warrior character getting equipped with a replacement limb whose end is a working Gattling gun -- which also can be refitted to function as an electric drill! - were what made me want to check out PINK FORCE COMMANDO. What came as a bonus though was the movie's star deigning to do quite a bit of serious acting -- some of which was actually so effective as to provide this generally absurd film with some unexpectedly moving moments (but others of which I did find funnier than they probably were intended to be) -- rather than just always hamming it up to the hilt (Something those who have viewed "The Eagle Shooting Heroes" know that she is equally able of doing).

At this juncture, little doubt should remain of it being so that PINK FORCE COMMANDO is -- by normal standards and on most counts -- a stupefyingly terrible piece of work. Nonetheless, my own experience provides testimony that some pleasure can be derived from viewing what might be described as a female-dominated East Asian spaghetti western (If not for this all sounding majorly oxymoronic and the film's additionally featuring a black leather wearing motorbiker (Blackie Ko), black suited ninjas, villains dressed in white KKK-like robes and others in Nazi-type military uniforms along with a strong, clearly sensitive and largely silent Heart-Broken Man!).

Hence my awarding this crackpot affair a "top of the "pretty awful" range" rating of: 4. (by YTSL of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Pink Panther (Hong Kong, 1993: Law Chi) - aka Rouge Killer** - "Pink Panther" is not distinguished on any specific index of quality or production values other than its unique plot and Nadeki's leading character, "Wang Fu-nan." Apparently living completely outside the law in a sisterhood of abuse survivors, Wang Fu-nan fights a virtual guerilla war against partner violence. The opening scene involves an exemplary genital mutilation performed very publicly in a nightclub. Abduction, torture, and a kind of brainwashing seem all in a day's work for Wang's cult-like following of gun-toting motorcyclists who favor blue denim cut-offs.

The police appear to turn a blind eye to this vigilantism, and actually approach the gang to request assistance in fighting a drug-smuggling triad operation. When Wang's group abducts and tortures one of the triads, he reveals a drug shipment which they intercept. This provokes a series of chases and battles culminating in a full-fledged confrontation at the ruined industrial plant that often serves as the setting for the final fight in low budget Taiwanese action films. Prior to the finale, after Wang is abducted and beaten, her captors plan to assault her. Although tied up she simply shows her teeth and bites the triad leader on his nose -- drawing blood. Once again, the symbolism of sexual aggression and counter-aggression seems salient. Freed in the nick of time by her companions, Wang participates in a classic GWG finale in which Nadeki's martial arts skills are put to good use against multiple opponents.

Co-stars include To Kwai-fa and an unidentified Taiwanese spitfire whose ingénue looks belie supply martial artistry and a waspish manner best displayed in "Guardian Angel." The stamp of Nadeki's rather cold, stiff screen persona is prominent in this film -- which largely dispenses with victimization to spend more time focusing on retaliation. In this manner, "Pink Panther" represents perhaps the ultimate refinement of the vengeance formula as a virtual pre-emptive strike. The distinction between "Final Girl" and simple perpetrator is as blurred as the gender signifiers. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Pintsik (Phillipines, 1994: Jun Aristorenas)** - When her father is kidnapped and held for ransom in the Philippines, Yukari arrives and is assisted by a group of bumbling petty thieves assigned to aid her by an NBI officer in this Philippino Tagalog/English action comedy. They are lured to a morgue where the gang members - pretending to be corpses - attack them. Yukari easily defeats eight attackers. After locating the gang's remote hideout they rescue the hostage. Following a car chase they sleep in the jungle where a giant snake slithers over them. Yukari faints. They are captured by the pursuing gang and held in an ice plant. After being released by a neighborhood child there is a final fight with the gang. Against the generally formulaic action, Yukari's experience and skill stand head and shoulders above the others, but this means she has to pull her punches. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Plot, The (Hong Kong, 1991: Yu Chik-Lim)** - Judging by the title, I guess I was expecting this film to have somewhat like a psychological mind-game plot (and by that I mean the scheme set up by the character) in general. But too bad, I guess some characters are just way too dumb and/or "smart" to expose some real simple plots, while some characters who think that they are real smart for making a flawless plot turns out to have their plans exposed pretty quickly, making this film less amusing to watch.

There're 2 main plots that have taken place in the story. The first main plot is set up by the "intelligent" Wong Kun Ting (played by Simon Yam), who plans to eliminate his god-brothers so he can take over the international weapons trafficking business for himself. In general, Wong's plot is really simple, and it's not really mind-killing, as he's just sending out assassins to kill off his brothers. In the beginning, Wong plots to secretly betray and kill his elder brother Kiu (played by Kenneth Tsang) during an armory trade, but the plot turns out to be a flawed deployment since there's a survivor who later exposes his plot. Likewise, Wong initially tries to set his other brother, Chan Nam (played by Sun Chien), up so Chan can get arrested or killed by the police during an armory trade. Unfortunately, Wong's plot didn't go too well cuz even the simple-minded Chan quickly figures out that it was all Wong's doing. Oh well, I guess Wong's plot will only work on Kiu's daughter, Amy (played by Wan Yin-Hung), who seems to be totally brainless at several critical moments where she could have got rid of Wong sooner.

The second main plot (or operation) is set up by the police who attempts to take down the international weapons trafficking business by sending two double agents, Lily (played by Emily Chu) and Fai (played by Alex Fong) to get close with Wong and Chan. First, both Lily and Fai gain trust from Chan and help him escape from being assassinated. Then, Lily plots to get closer to Wong and his business by revealing Chan's whereabouts to him. From that point on, there's a bit of a mind-game going on between Lily and Wong cuz while Wong is taking a defense, Lily is trying to gain trust from him and not revealing her identity at the same time. Unfortunately and again, Wong already has an idea that she and one of his thugs are undercover.

Well, I guess there's one final plot that's taken place near the end. After Fai suddenly reveals his true identity to Chan, they both plot to rescue Lily from Wong's hands by mixing in with the buyer's gang during an armory trade. I must say this plot is pretty brilliant, yet unrealistic, cuz their plan didn't get exposed sooner until someone finally realizes Lily's gone.

As for the subplots, I'm not too sure if I follow them. For examples, there's a part where Chan is fighting this female assassin (played by To Gwai-Fa) after his girlfriend is killed, then a scene constantly cuts in showing 2 men being killed by some thugs. I've no clue who they are and why they're being killed, and there wasn't any explanation at all. In fact, the film didn't really explain the female assassin was hired by Wong to kill Chan, it's just my assumption. Moreover, the fact that Lily and Fai are long-term lovers is a bit unexpected and unknown until they both suddenly get emotional with each other, as well as the flashback showing they're lovers, near the ending.

Actors: 2.5/5: Nobody really has an outstanding performance and role. Simon Yam is still playing as an vicious character, which is always convincing. Alex Fong didn't get much of a role as his character is always "hidden" in the story. Sun Chien hardly gives any emotion, but I guess I'm convinced since his character is supposed to be simple-minded.

As for Emily Chu, she's lovely as ever, and her character stands out more given that she has to play the "mind game" with her target to gain trust. There's also one part I think she's done a pretty decent job is when she struggles rather she should continue to take part in the operation or withdraw herself after seeing another double agent get caught before her eyes.

The Production Crew: In most HK action-crime films from the 80s and 90s, it's truly natural for the characters to use their fists rather than guns in a fight. For this film, the martial choreography is fine, but not as entertaining if you compare it with another classic HK action-crime film.

And the director/script writer should probably work on explaining the subplots with some depths, or else the audiences will be easily confused with the story and relationships between characters.

Memorable scene(s): This film has such an epic ending! When Wong and his thugs have their guns pointed at Chan in a little hut, Lily, who has herself wrapped with explosive materials, pops out and threatens everyone to surrender. Being in a critical situation, Wong agrees to surrender. And when he's about to speak out his terms before making a surrender, his Filipino hitman (played by Kong Long) didn't know Lily is armed with explosive materials and shoots her. And then KABOOM! Everyone that's in and close to the hut is dead! Only Fai survives from the battlefield.

Worth Watching A Second Time? Go ahead and watch it once or twice. (by wyeeso of HKMDB)

**Police Story (Hong Kong, 1985: Jackie Chan) – aka Jackie Chan's Police Force** - "As far as action is concerned, *Police Story* is my favorite movie I've ever made..." – Jackie Chan from *I Am Jackie Chan* (1998 with Jeff Yang)

French film-maker Jean-Luc Godard once said that the best criticism a director can make of one film is to make another. Jackie Chan was so dissatisfied with his experience on the cop drama *The Protector*, his second starring lead in an American film after *Battle Creek Brawl*, that he decided to make his own police story under his underused vanity label Golden Ways Films Ltd. In Hong Kong, he would have much more control over the script, stunt coordination and direction (he made sure he would direct this film) that if he was going to flounder it would be on his terms. The result of his efforts is one of my favorite action films as well as Jackie's personal favorite amongst his modern fare. I consider this a classic among action cinema and I hope I can persuade you to see this, if you have not already, like I attempted to with my previous essay on *Yojimbo*.

Jackie Chan is Chan Ka-kui a model Hong Kong cop who gets involved in a police procedural code-named Operation Boar Hunt to take down a triad led by Chu Tu (prolific director/actor Chor Yuen). This operation begins in a shanty town specifically built for the film. The detail is extraordinary in the design and like everything created for an action film it is short-lived. In one of the most awesome car chases I have ever witnessed on screen (for me up there with *Bullitt* and *The Blue's Brother's* mall scene) Chu Tu after being cornered by the police decide to drive through the hovels instead of being captured and Chan decides to chase after. The juxtaposition of having the camera in the vehicle and long shots in which stuntmen are scurrying to avoid being hit (several stuntmen were injured in this scene) are sagacious in displaying the maelstrom of destruction. That and it is pretty damn cool.

Most films would have given a respite after that tumultuous scene of car and house derby but as soon as Chan finishes the car chase he goes into foot mode while running after a double-decker bus that Chu Tu and a few of his cronies hijacked. In several of these scenes as he catches up to the bus he is literally hanging by an umbrella as he holds onto the outside of the bus trying to climb his way in while fighting people who do not want him aboard as well as dodging traffic as the bus speeds along. Two of the stuntmen got hurt at the end of this scene where Ka Kui forces the bus to stop and as they flew out of the top windows they were supposed to land on top of the car that was stopped in the middle of the road but the backward momentum of the brakes as the bus rocked backward after stopping made them undershoot the stunt and land on the road.

*Police Story* has a stronger storyline than most Chan movies to connect the action scenes. After the arrest of Chu Tu, Inspector Li sets up his secretary Selina Fong (Brigitte Lin Ching-Hsia) by letting her go free of all charges to try to pit her against her boss. Ka Kui is assigned to protect her (several scenes of this scenario were cut out of the film). This, of course, will interfere and cause problems with his girlfriend May (Maggie Cheung Man-yuk whose relationship with Jackie is underplayed though that would change in the sequel). Chan tries to trick Selina into trusting him by pretending to save the day when Mars attacks Selina in her apartment. What ultimately happens because of this is predictable as well as the cop working for the triad but these are mere trifles.

The comedy is underrated in this film. There is a great sequence in which Jackie is assigned to the Sha Tau Kok Police Station, a rural area in the north eastern corner of Hong Kong, after he completely messes up the prosecution of Chu Tu. He deftly tries to answer several phones and juggle several conversations at the same time while not being really successful in solving any of them. Like *Project A*, his influence by silent film comedians is shown in how he performs this skit with physical perfection. This scene is so sublime I cannot fathom why this was missing in older American prints. I also enjoyed a nice little scene where Jackie does this beautiful car-slide stunt by doing the ultimate parallel parking literary by sliding the car parallel into a spot barely bigger than the car.

For many action fans the highlight of this film is the final sequence nicknamed "Glass Story" by the stuntmen. It takes place in a mall where Jackie has cornered Chu Tu and his cronies. It is 10 minutes of superlative martial arts, stunts and action. The highlights include great fights by Jackie with clothes racks, Brigitte Lin doing her own fighting, Chan doing a great jump into moving stairs, lots and lots of broken glass and the famous multi-story slide down a pole. Jackie severely burnt his hands on his slide down, partially attributed to the wrong voltage being set on the

lights attached to it and it is also mentioned on several web sites and his own autobiography that he injured his spine and hip on that drop. This is a bit doubtful (though I have had arguments on this point) because on a camera with an alternate angle from the floor shown in certain deleted footage shows him bouncing up after the fall and slugging a stuntman and according to Fung Hak-on hurting him. If you have ever had a back injury (I have several times) you usually do not get up after it happens or beat up your stuntmen.

This movie not only influenced the Hong Kong action picture and spawn several sequels, it would also influence American action pictures. Sylvester Stallone would use the bus scene in *Tango and Cash*, the shanty chase in Michael Bay's *Bad Boys II*, several early scenes were copied in *Rapid Fire*, Brett Ratner took so much from this film in making *Rush Hour* (self-admitted in Ratner's commentary on *Rush Hour* as well as Dragon Dynasty's *Police Story* DVD) and countless other action choreographers and directors would be directly or indirectly affected by this work. This movie was created because of the visionary ideas of Jackie Chan and also because of the exhaustive effort of Sing Ga Ban – Jackie Chan's Stuntman Association and their every increasing attempts to out due the rival stuntman association led by Sammo Hung. Their backbreaking accomplishments helped make this a hit (26 million HK dollars and win the Best Film for the Hong Kong Film Awards) and became a favorite of action auteur directors everywhere.

DVD Notes: I was so happy to get a R1 version of this film when Dragon Dynasty put out the DVD in 2006. The quality of the picture could be better (*Police Story 2* from Dragon Dynasty has a much better print) but overall I am satisfied with it. The commentary with Hong Kong action movie expert Bey Logan and director Brett Ratner (*Rush Hour*) was decent with Logan pointing out small tidbits of information like how Sammo Hung asked Bill Tung for horse advice during shooting, pointing out the cameo by Clarence Ford (*Naked Killer*) as the photographer and also pointing out who every person acting was though sometimes this got annoying. I did wish he would have put more info about one of my favorite actors Fung Hak-on who helped with the stunt choreography and acted as Danny Chu. Ratner would talk about how this movie influenced him and occasionally get his facts wrong (like confuse Brigitte Lin with Maggie Cheung) and was completely ignorant about many Jackie Chan films (*Winners and Sinners* and every other early Jackie Chan film except *Drunken Master*) but was still decent to listen to. There are deleted scenes, alternate opening and ending, A Tribute to Jackie Chan, A conversation with Jackie Chan, Stunts Unlimited: A retrospective with members of the celebrated Jackie Chan stunt team and trailers. It has Cantonese and English soundtracks though Jackie was not yet using his voice on the Cantonese dubbing. This movie has also been released by Shout! on BD and DVD with *Police Story 2*. But they lack the plethora of extras that the Dragon Dynasty releases have. (by Masterofoneinchpunch of KFF)

**Police Story 2 (Hong Kong, 1988: Jackie Chan)** - Sergeant Chan Ka Kui (Jackie Chan) is pulled back into the dangerous world of law enforcement. When a small gang of crooks are terrorizing the streets of Hong Kong, by rigging bombs in public places. In addition Sergeant Chan's old nemesis Chu Tao (Chor Yuen) is out of jail and looking to get even. With his long suffering girlfriend May (Maggie Cheung) getting caught right in the middle.

There's little new or original that can be said about this 1988 action classic. It captures Jackie Chan still at the peak of his physical and creative talents. With a decent sized budget to back him up, this movie was a co-production between Chan's own company Golden Way Films, Golden Harvest & Paragon Films Ltd. In true Chan style he threw himself into the production, directing and co-writing the script with Edward Tang (The Young Master). Not to mention starring in the movie and contributing to the creation of the flawless fights on display. The first movie was a damn hard act to follow, and we are reminded of this by a montage of the first films action sequences at the start of the movie. Even a man of Jackie Chan's calibre would find it hard to top the original movie. When I first watched this sequel as a teenager, part one was still fresh in my mind. That was the film that spectacularly introduced me to Chan's 1980's filmography. As good as the sequel could be, it would be impossible to top my first experience of the real life spider man in action.

It's been some years since I last sat down and watched the sequel. I've been exposed to a lot more films since then and wondered if it would still hold up today?. The answer is yes it does still hold up. In fact in this day and age where so many films are digitally altered or created on a green screen set, it's appears even more jaw dropping in terms of action. Not that digitally altered fight scenes can't be entertaining or creative. There's just not many things that can beat a straight up brawl featuring real people in real locations.

Which brings me onto the subject of the movies fight choreography created by the Jackie Chan stunt team. This being a collaborative effort know one person can be credited for the impressive encounters. While the movie does not feature the same grand opening seen in the original. It does have some high quality martial arts action throughout its hour and forty minute run time. Before the first fight scene, we see Chan Ka Kui dodge heavy traffic on



Gloucester road in Hong Kong. According to Hong Kong stuntman Jude Poyer, that sequence alone took some two weeks to create. Filming on location in HK I've heard is not easy, filming on such a prominent and busy road must have made this even tougher. Once Can Ka Kui makes it across the road miraculously in one piece, he confronts crooked cowardly lawyer John Koo(Charlie Cho Cha-Lee) and his lackeys for hire.

What follows is a superb example of the unique Hong Kong/Jackie Chan stunt team style of action. A style that's been imitated so much in the years since this movie came out. Chan and his team were so far ahead of everyone else, these action scene were years ahead of their time. They still hold up to anything that's been created by Hollywood and any other country in the last ten or so years. The second set of fisticuffs done Asian style, takes place in a public park at night. This set piece takes the first fight and amps it up some more and then some.

Charlie Cho Cha Lee's obnoxious over the top lawyer character tries to get even, with a bigger gang of thugs this time. Most of them brandishing steel bars as they threaten to break Chan's legs. What follows is one of the best fight scenes ever put on film. The thugs fight Chan in, on and around a children's adventure playground. Jude Poyer points out on the Hong Kong Legends commentary track, that most new Hong Kong movies are filmed in the same time it took them to shoot this one scene. This was in 2001, and it certainly says a lot about why there's been a dip in quality in Hong Kong films over the last decade or so. Apart from the amazing talents involved in the playground scuffle, one of the reasons it looks so great is they were given the time to make it look good. A luxury that only the big budget movies appear to get. I'm sure if they tried to shoot this movie in two weeks, it would have taken a big dip in quality too.

Now let's skip to the finale set in a large abandoned fireworks factory. Ka Kui comes looking for his kidnapped girlfriend and he's taking no prisoners. Holding her hostage are three crooks, Hung(Ben Lam) Polar Bear(John Cheung) and the Mute(Benny Lai). The old factory gives Chan and his team some great opportunities to be creative with the screen combat. To do this sequence justice I'd be better writing a whole separate piece on it. There's a lot gets crammed into the final few stunt heavy fights. Benny Lai who had a minor role in the first movie, plays one of the more memorable characters. The mute finally gets to show off more of his impressive foot work. With Chan allowing the diminutive martial Artist to appear to be a threat to him, rather than just another cannon fodder villain. You get the idea that Sergeant Chan is not skilled enough to face him. Resulting with him using some small but explosive arial shells(fireworks) on the mute to subdue him. Lai really puts on a fine performance all round and it would have been nice to see more of his excellent kicking repertoire. He shows some real guts when he performs the sequence with the explosives, with his clothes being set alight for real.

Veteran Hong Kong actor John Cheung(Writing Kung Fu) delivers another strong action performance here. Him and Chan get to show off some nice exchanges during their frantic fights. What I love about the finale, is how Chan is fighting off three guys at the same time. This has a lot to do with the how they edited the footage together too. Such a scene could easily become hard to follow, but this is not the case here. It doesn't matter who's involved at given time, because the quality of the action always stays consistent throughout. I would Love to know the names of the stuntmen who doubled for the more riskier moments. Just so they too could be given credit for their talents and ballsy antics onscreen. Ben Lam(Eastern Condors) also gives his all here while trying to stop the movies hero from succeeding. While Cheung and Lam may not have Benny Lai's level of Martial Arts skills, they still do a really excellent job during the action scenes. It's certainly not hard to see why this film won best action design at the 8th annual Hong Kong film awards in 1988.

Before I move on I have to mention the talents of the movies star. The many hair raising and jaw dropping stunts he put his body through for this production, is nothing short of spectacular. Dodging big street signs while atop a public bus being just one highlight. The stunt sequences like the finale itself do deserve a whole separate write up. This movie is a classic example of the high quality productions Golden Harvest were making around this period. Along with many of Chan's other movies from the period, Police Story 2 is the archetypal 1980s Golden Harvest production. If only they were still making productions like this in the 21st century.

The movie is not without its faults, I felt they could have trimmed about ten minutes of the run time. This would certainly help the films pace that drags at times. Not sure what the even longer Japanese cut is like?, with an extra twenty minutes added to the run time. The main villains turn up a little too late in the story in my opinion too. With most of the focus going on the previous films antagonist played by director/actor Chor Yuen. Not that there's anything wrong with having Chor Yuen in the movie, it makes sense. It's just in the final cut it appears that the film makers were unsure who should be the heroes main opposition.

Maggie Cheung is terrific as Chan's girlfriend May, who always seems to get a raw deal. Maggie proved she was as tough as anyone else on set by doing a lot of her own stunts. One outtake seen during the credits show's her taking an awful bump in one sequence. The resulting injury required her to receive fifteen stitches on the top of her head.

This being a Police Story movie means she had to put on a strong physical performance. Even if it didn't require any fancy Martial Arts moves. Series regulars Lam Gwok Hung as Inspector Raymond Lam and Bill Tung as Uncle Bill also deserve highlighting. The film while darker and more serious than its predecessor still retains some comedy. With Bill Tung's character suffering from some comedic bowel related problems or sudden urges as he calls them.

While it's been said countless times before, Police Story Part II is essential viewing for Asian action fans. A movie I appreciate and enjoy more with each viewing. I'm still spotting new little details in the frantic playground fight even now. Look out for a number of cameos including Ken Lo as a fire chief and veteran comedy actor Wu Ma as a mall security guard. (by DragonClaws of KFF)

**Police Story 3: Supercop (Hong Kong, 1992: Stanley Tong) - aka Supercop** - In each successive film, Jackie Chan is more and more a pleasure to watch. Hong Kong's stunt and kung-fu legend is not only an amazing athlete and action star, but a gifted comedic actor as well. To wit: Supercop.

As precocious as the name is (it's the American title -- Supercop is actually the third installment in the Police Story series), Supercop shows off both sides of Chan's ability quite well -- much better than the mysteriously more popular *Rumble in the Bronx*. Some of this is probably due to the presence of Michelle Yeoh -- but more about that later.

For those of you who saw the original *Police Story* or *Police Story 2*, the premise is much the same: Chan plays Kevin, Hong Kong's resident "supercop" (hence the American name) and action junkie. As the film opens, Kevin is eavesdropping on a conversation between his "Uncle" Bill, captain of the police force, and a higher-up. The higher-up wants Kevin to work on a dangerous assignment, but Bill refuses to assign Kevin to the case -- he thinks Kevin will get killed. While he admits that Kevin is the best cop on the force, he still thinks the assignment is too dangerous. Once the higher-up leaves, Kevin pleads with Uncle Bill to let him work on the case. Bill finally acquiesces, and Kevin smiles to himself for convincing his Uncle Bill that he's a big boy. Once Kevin leaves, we discover that the entire conversation was for Kevin's benefit. The higher-up emerges from hiding and the two men congratulate each other (somewhat shamefacedly) on their cleverness. It's pure movie magic from there.

Kevin's assignment takes place in communist China proper and Malaysia. His new superior (played by Michelle Yeoh) tells him of his mission: He is to infiltrate a group of drug-runners and terrorists by aiding the escape of an unwitting prisoner who is one of their number. This prisoner, known as "Panther," adopts Kevin into the fold for the great job he did busting him out of jail.

If we were forced to pick an actress who would then beat the living daylights out of us, it would be Michelle Yeoh. Then at least we could keep some self-respect, because we'd know we were being bludgeoned by the best. Yeoh is an accomplished athlete, as she has shown in films such as *Wing Chun* and *Heroic Trio*. Although we understand she practices no martial arts, she sure does fake it well. She didn't know how to ride a motorcycle before the shooting of this film either, but you'd never know it by the way she lands on top of that moving train. Yeoh, like Chan, does her own stunts.

The pain of such a beating would also be lessened by the fact that Yeoh is no slouch in the looks department, either. If you think she starts out homely in that uniform at the start of the movie, wait 40 minutes and you'll change your tune. Please keep in mind that this scenario would only be desirable if we were forced to choose. We don't normally fantasize about being beaten up by actresses -- at least not that we admit to each other.

Yeoh's presence in *Supercop* is quite welcome. She makes a good partner for Chan -- proving that sometimes "buddy" movies really do work. It's nice to see Chan's goofy faces and reactions bounce off of someone besides the bad guys.

*Supercop* was Jackie's second feature under director Stanley Tong. This fact is noteworthy because Chan has a tendency to alienate any one tries to direct him. Wong Jing was apparently so scarred by his experience with Jackie on *City Hunter* that in Jing's next film, *High Risk*, he created an unflattering parody of Jackie's persona. Perhaps Chan and Tong found kindred spirits in each other. By this we mean they're both crazy.

Stories of Jackie's insanity are numerous (we call him the Human Bruise), so we won't go into any more detail. But we do have a story to relate about Stanley Tong. During the making of *Stone Age Warriors*, Stanley was hesitant to send his two female stars over a waterfall as the script demanded. So instead, he and his head stuntman dressed as the two women, tied themselves to a branch, and went over themselves. At least we know he's not asking his stars to do anything he isn't prepared to do himself. You'll also see the insane Mr Tong at the top of a crane with a camera in the outtakes at the end of *Supercop*.

What Tong brings to his films is crunch -- lots and lots of crunch. During the numerous actions scenes in *Supercop*, and in particular the final prison van/wimpy sports car/helicopter/motorcycle/train chase at the end, all sorts of collisions are staged for our unbelieving eyes, all rendered in loving detail. Watch in particular the scene in which the helicopter is tied to the train -- where do you think the creators of the *Mission Impossible* movie got the idea, anyway?

And as if that weren't enough, at the end of the film we get to see outtakes of the stunts that didn't work. Our favorite is one where Michelle Yeoh is hanging off the prison van and is supposed to land on the hood of a moving car. In the outtake, Michelle misses her mark and hits the pavement. Meanwhile, her spotter lurches into frame, makes a grab for her, and then eats pavement himself. In scenes like this, the creators say to us, "Look how much pain we went through to make this film. You don't want that to be for nothing, do you?"

At the heart of it all, though, is Jackie Chan. He not only kicks butt, but manages to be funny and sensitive as well. Jackie is a real man's man -- he can stage a fight on top of a moving train while wearing a pastel yellow jumpsuit and still look plenty macho. When was the last time you saw Arnold Schwarzenegger in a pastel yellow jumpsuit? And hey, Arnie doesn't even do his own stunts. (by Scott Hamilton and Chris Holland of Stomp Tokyo)

**Police Story IV: First Strike (Hong Kong, 1996: Stanley Tong) -- aka Jackie Chan's First Strike** - Judging "*First Strike*" fairly depends on whether you count it as an actual part of the "*Police Story*" series or not. The "*Police Story*" label just seems to have been slapped on for the hell of it and doesn't really have any bearing on the movie as such. This is typical 90's Jackie Chan fare, no matter what you call it.

This marked Jackie's third collaboration with Stanley Tong, and in terms of style, very much a blend of their two previous efforts. Just like in "*Supercop*", Jackie is the globetrotting, watered down version of his iconic cop character, while the action is more of the same family friendly, slapstick happy, stunt oriented variety that we saw in "*Rumble in the Bronx*", and whatever plot the movie purports to have is utterly forgettable. Yes, another clear cut case of Jackie Lite, aimed at the broadest possible audience. But the fresh locations plus the amount and quality of inventive action set pieces on display is very much what saves "*First Strike*" from completely becoming just another generic 90's effort from the Chanster.

At this point, the Ka Kui character had become a mere shell of what we saw in the first two installments, and more of just Jackie's standard screen persona of this vintage. It's not like he stretched his dramatic range too much in his preceding decades of stardom, but the grit and edge of this dogged HK street cop was surely gone by this time, which is a shame. Also, as per usual, he has found some of the worst gwailo actors money can buy, to provide some international flair. But at least guys like Bill Tung, Jackson Lau and his own stunt guys also gets a bit of play. The hulking Nathan Jones is a fun foil for Jackie as he is twice his size, and Annie Wu is cute to look at, but not much more than that. None of them really have that much to do, as this is very much the Jackie Chan show and put on a show he does.

Yes, this is essentially just a parade of big stunts, physical comedy and a few fisticuffs strung together by a wafer thin narrative. But if watched as more of a showcase for JC and his stunt team, and you don't expect pesky distractions like story or character development, then it's really not too bad. Stuff like the snow chase, the ladder fight, Chinatown funeral sequence and the aquarium showdown are hugely entertaining and fun to watch, and you can tell that time, effort and ingenuity went into all of them.

*First Strike* falls in the mid-range of Jackie's work. It's not bad, but far from great. With multiple markets to please, he became more image conscious, and his creative output suffered as a result. Stacked against his earlier work, the run of films from the latter half of the 90's were rather underwhelming. But compared to what was on the horizon, the likes of *First Strike* still provides a healthy dose of nostalgic enjoyment and relentless energy, from when Jackie was still being Jackie. (by TibetanWhiteCrane of KFF)

**Pom Pom (Hong Kong, 1984: Joe Cheung)** - Beethoven (John Shum) and Ah-Chiu (Richard Ng) are two women loving cops who can't stop playing pranks on each other. One day after being tipped off by Wen (Tai Bo) on a drug deal. They suddenly jump to action (both hoping for a promotion) and stop the superstar 'Sha' (Peter Chan Lung), although he is clean, no evidence of any dealing at all and the two cops are left looking stupid. Now given the mission to find evidence enough to put the evil Sha in jail, for good!

Both Chiu and Beethoven are also looking for love. Chiu starts a steady relationship with the Iron Lady, Anna (Deanie Yip). After many failed attempts Beethoven still comes out unlucky, he nearly makes with a relative of a murder victim. The victim was also Sha's girlfriend, coincidence...I think not.

*Pom Pom* is a treat to any fan of silly action movies. Picking up as a spin off from the original 'Winners and Sinners'. If your wondering where the heck is the rest of our gang! Sammo, Charlie and Stanley make a cameo appearance along with Jackie Chan, who is still a cop. Yuen Biao has went from cop to truck driver! As well as Lam Ching-Ying to whom has went from Crimeboss Butler to Police Officer!

The ending scenes of the film are very amusing. Some cool stunts of Beethoven jumping from a balcony and then hitting the road hard into a forward roll. Beethoven also recreates the scene from *Winners and Sinners* where Jackie Chan being pulled by a truck on roller skates. Although Shum does it with out skates!

Fans of the series such as *My Lucky Stars*, *Twinkle Twinkle* and of course *Winners and Sinners*. So if your a fan of comedy cops, decent action, stunts, fab cameos this is for you, if not you should at least watch it once!

#### Highlights

The introduction

Chiu dropping his fag ashes

Beethoven attempting to fool Chiu with the telephone

Colombo!

Ah-Chiu's cheeky grin

The Cameos!

Dick Wei's Ass

The Ending Scenes

The Music when Beethoven gives on the car at the end

Beethoven buying Chiu a prostitute on his date with Anna

**Pom Pom and Hot Hot (Hong Kong, 1992: Joe Cheung)** - This film has rightfully gained near legendary status for the amazing action filled finale in which Jacky Cheung, Lam Ching-ying and Stephen Tung battle it out with an array of bad guys. The last twenty minutes of the film is a feast of kung fu gunplay, spitting bullets, a fusillade of firepower, splattered bloody bodies, aerodynamic impossibilities and gut checking mano y mano face offs. Even after seeing more HK shoot outs than I can recall, this one had me on the razor's edge of nervous delight. It is simply fabulous. Now what is sometimes overlooked is that for the seventy minutes leading up to this finale, the film is primarily a light, goofy romantic comedy! This is after all a Hong Kong film.

This film is in fact all over the place and takes more detours than a lost cab driver with the meter running. Jacky and Stephen are assigned to catch some gun smugglers by their police supervisor Lam Ching-ying – called Shooter Yin for his astonishing gun prowess. But the two of them seem to spend very little time doing much of anything police related. There are a couple of small action scenes, but the film is taken up primarily with the two of them being hosts to Jacky's visiting cousins from the Mainland – Alfred Cheung and Loletta Lee.

Alfred is a bit of starched shirt who brow beats his poor sister to the point where she has to literally pound her head against the wall. Loletta is needless to say adorable and lovely. There is much made of the cultural differences between the Hongies and the Mainlanders and there is a lengthy Mahjong game in which they play by the HK, Taiwan and Mainland rules and cultural digs are made at all.

While Jacky woos Loletta – leading to one of my favorite upside down hanging from a rope cinematic mid-air kissing scenes, Alfred romances an old love (played by the delightfully trashy Bonnie Fu who was “Virgin” in “Full Contact”) who now runs a hostess bar. Some of this is reasonably amusing, but after hearing about the final scene for quite a while I was anxious to get to it.

They find seven dead bodies of a triad group and in a lovely scene Lam Ching-ying demonstrates how one killer was able to do this – and now its their time to face him. This killer (Austin Wai – the father in *The Blade*) is so good that when he runs out of bullets – as he did after the first six kills – he reloads his gun by spitting bullets into the empty cartridge. In a heart-thumping scene he and Lam Ching-ying face off against each other as Jackie and Stephen take on the rest of the gang. Lam Ching-ying is so good in this film and every time he enters a scene it immediately takes on an energy charge.

Stephen Tung also does the action choreography for this film – some other films that he has been an action director on are *A Better Tomorrow*, *Magnificent Warriors*, *The Blade*, *Magic Cop*, *Downtown Torpedoes* and *Purple Storm*.  
(by Brian from View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Power Connection (Hong Kong/Phillipines, 1995: Philip Ko Fei)** - This HK-Filipino co-production was made at the tail-end of the Girls n' Guns genre, when practically all of these movies were meaning made in the Phillipines. And it only makes sense that this one would feature Yukari Oshima, since she had a Strong following there, billed in her movies as "Cynthia Luster". The plot is some nonsense (written by cut n' splice maestro Godfrey Ho, no less) about a Filipino cop with a mullet and a mustache named Ray going after a drug dealer named Dick. After killing his right-hand man (Philip Ko Fei, who directed and choreographed this movie, and had actually dated/married Yukari Oshima at some point), Ray chases Dick to Hong Kong. At the same time, Yukari Oshima is a HK cop disguised as an enforcer for Henry, a local crime boss who's losing his clientes to Dick. Ray finds out that Dick had promised his girlfriend Lina a singing career in Hong Kong, but locked her in a mansion and got her hooked on heroin instead. Dick eventually kills Lina and flees to the Phillipines, with Ray and Yukari in hot pursuit. There is a fair amount of gunplay here, which is exaggerated, but sort of fun. Yukari shines in her three fight scenes, and her opponents include hung gar stylist Mark Houghton and a flashy kicker. Too bad her fights only add up to four minutes of screen time. Not great, but it's at least a little bitter than Ko Fei's own *Yes Madam 5* made at the same time. (by Blake Matthews)

**Prince of Temple Street (Hong Kong, 1992: Jeffrey Chiang)** - One of Lam Moon-Wah's most successful movies, financially speaking, was 1992's Prince of Temple Street. Andy Lau plays a low-level Triad working on Temple Street, a collection of stalls and shops (with a few brothels and opium dens hidden from public view). When an old rival is released from jail, he finds his territory under attack. There are several chopper brawls to be seen here, one of which features a nice "oh cool!" moment where a motorcycle is broadsided by a car, which sends the driver flying, whom is then cut down mid-air by the main villain, played by Chin Ho. The second-to-last set piece features a lot of vehicular mayhem and random explosions, but little in the way of actual physical combat. That's reserved for the end, where Andy Lau infiltrates the Chin Ho's hideout and goes all out with the machete and drop-kicking moves. He then has a vicious one-on-one with Chin Ho, complete with throws, punches, take-downs, and surprisingly enough, some wire-assisted jump kicks, too. All of this inside a building that is already on fire! It's a shame that the movie waits so long to get moving. And much like *The Club*, the decision to focus the finale on just one person makes the action more satisfying the previous brawls, which don't stand out because so much is happening at once.

**Prince of the Sun (Hong Kong, 1990: Wellson Chin) – aka Shaolin Lady** - When the great almighty Buddha is reincarnated as a young child it's up to a group of misfits to protect this young child from a group of evil priests led by a evil half bat/man lord (played by Lau Shun).

The misfits is made up of a Mainland Chinese bumpkin (Conan Lee), a bitchy teacher with a gambling problem (Shella Chan) and female martial artist (Cynthia Rothrock) sent to save the boy, sent by the spirit of one of Buddha's top men (Lam Ching-Ying).

Okay, let me just say this is possibly one of the worst movies I've seen.

This is a very bad movie, curse Wellson Chin for this, he has besmirched the careers of Lam Ching-Ying and Conan Lee. Well for Cynthia Rothrock this was probably a step up for her and her stunt double.

Now I think I might not have resented the film so much if it wasn't dubbed. The young boy is giving the attitude of a witty smart ass, which is AMAZINGLY annoying, I'd shoot that child and the compulsive gambler is x2 times as annoying. Lam Ching-Ying and Conan Lee both try their best to give good performances, but with what they have to work with, I wouldn't expect them too.

Notable appearances include a cameo appearances from Tai Bo as a friend of Conan Lee who helps him get to Hong Kong. Veteran actor Wu Fung makes an appearance as the primary school headmaster who fires the Shella Chan's ass!

There is one or two funny moments like Lam Ching-Ying on the telly and being bad mouthed by Shella Chan. Also when a spell was casted on Shella Chan which mirrors the appearances of both Cynthia Rothrock and Conan Lee, so when she moves, they two both copy her, its pretty funny when they trying to walk down the stepping stones.

The rest is crap, the window frame joke, the child being slapped from one side of the room to the other, the manikin dummy doubling the child, Cynthia Rothrock's noticeable stunt double, the rather puny looking bad guys and the stupid four-eyed guy who throws darts.

Final Thoughts - crap. (by HKCuk.co.uk)

**Princess Madam (Hong Kong, 1989: Godfrey Ho)** - Moon Lee and Sharon Yeung Pan-Pan play cop partners whose impossibly accurate shooting kills most of a motorcycle-riding gang led by Michiko in an attack on a police vehicle convoy. When her lover is killed (blown up on his own grenade), Michiko's character seeks revenge against Moon Lee.

She does this by seducing Moon's husband. Michiko appears glamorous in a black evening dress, heels and heavy makeup. Once she's got him alone, she quite literally marks him with a vicious bite. Later, she stalks him with repeated telephone calls. On their anniversary Moon sits at home waiting until her husband eventually comes home badly beaten by Michiko. When they eventually confront her at a restaurant, Michiko springs a trap and kidnaps them both, suspending Moon above a crude bomb while first licking her husband then breaking a champagne bottle on his leg. The two are rescued by the intervention of Sharon Yeung. Despite Michiko's firepower advantage (she's carrying a machine-pistol in her leather jacket), Moon and Pan-Pan make short work of her, although Michiko manages to throw some solid punches and kicks.

This thread appears to have been part of an unfinished project. The remaining half hour of the film predominantly involves Sharon Yeung in a heroic bloodshed confrontation, in an almost unrelated story line.

This film is distinguished by Michiko's participation in a relatively sexually graphic threesome, augmented by coke sniffing. She caresses the other female participant and bites her male lover while he is engaged in sex. Later, there is an extraordinary scene in which Michiko extracts a bullet from this woman's breast after the failed ambush. It's quite uncomfortable to watch, and well acted – although very brief. These strong images – and Michiko's facial expressions ranging from the demure to the rapacious – define the distinctively sexual nature of the movie. Michiko's presence adds elements usually reserved for Cat. III, but acted so much better.

Her best moments must surely be when telephoning Moon's husband while throwing darts at Moon's photograph, or when contemplating her near-victory after having captured them both. Michiko appears striking in red leather, but visibly compromised by intoxication. Her character's actions are slightly unsteady – not enough to derail her plan, but just enough to nullify her physical allure. As she drinks from the champagne bottle the fluid escapes, running glistening down her chin. Her wet skin catches the light, a glint of madness.

This is a quite uneven film, perhaps owing to the presence of cut-and-paste elements. Moon and Pan-Pan wear unattractive costumes, although the film features one of Moon's relatively few appearances in a dress. The action scenes are fair, ranging from cheesy to intense. Pan-Pan's final bloodbath has little to do with Michiko's thread – but is worth viewing. Michiko's part as a sultry, unstable, unpredictably dangerous femme fatale is enhanced by fine costuming and a strong performance. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Prison on Fire (Hong Kong, 1987: Ringo Lam)** - Possibly Ringo Lam and his writer (as well as brother) Nam Yin are demonstrating life on the inside versus the outside is not drastically if at all different. Politics and environment fueled by turmoil could exist on either side of the wall but the feel of *Prison On Fire* is that of being ultimately stripped of commentary. The focus instead is to deliver an effective, brutally violent prison-drama and Ringo had showcased his often unmatched vision for explosive and gritty violence in *City On Fire* already. Not a fluke occurrence as it turned out, the almost meticulous staging of whatever violent act or occurrence is eerily chilling. Ranging from the opening car accident that gets Tony Leung's career his manslaughter sentence to Roy Cheung bashing Shing Fui-On's head in or the enclosed, animalistic finale. All this is Ringo in his element as he's clearly confident letting this be his voice. But bad, bloody times are of course also balanced against even-tempered times as Chow Yun-Fat in particular gets to be charismatic and fun as a respected veteran of the prison. Teaching the newbie played by Tony Leung the ropes, negotiating terms and trying to avoid violent altercations with triads such as William Ho's Mickey, this plays out at a blistering pace that shows a keen eye for punishing an ensemble cast physically as well as letting them add veteran-faces and presence to make the realism come to life. As masterful and confident as *City On Fire* is, it is *Prison On Fire* that shows a filmmaker having found and now happily is extending his cinematic voice. (by So Good Reviews)

**Prison on Fire 2 (Hong Kong, 1991: Ringo Lam)** - Don't let the number in the title fool you, you don't have to have seen *Prison on Fire* to enjoy this film. This movie is completely self-contained, and is probably superior to the original. *Prison on Fire 2* is a ripoff of *Cool Hand Luke*, but like many HK ripoffs of Hollywood films, it manages to be an effective film in its own right.

In *Prison on Fire 2*, the indefatigable Chow plays an inmate in a Hong Kong prison named Ah Ching. Ah is in prison for killing his wife, and is trying his best to raise his small son on the outside with the help of a social worker. The prison, however, is a bit of a powder keg due to the fact that the authorities have incarcerated a gang from mainland China, led by a criminal named Dragon, in the prison with the native Hong Kongers. So tensions are running a bit high.

Then things get worse for Ah, in the form of a borderline-insane Warden Zau, played well by Elvis Tsui. Zau comes down hard on the good natured Ah on the grounds that he is too good at cheering up the other prisoners. Ah is denied a weekend pass to visit his son by Zau, so Ah has no recourse but to escape. Ah turns himself in, but a situation is engineered by Zau that forces Ah to escape again. This time Ah meets up on the outside with Dragon, the leader of the Chinese gang, who has also escaped from the prison. The two male bond in typical HK fashion.

Ah is eventually recaptured, and Zau places Ah in the wing of the prison that houses the violent Chinese. Ah attempts to talk his way out, but soon the prison is on fire (hence the title) and all that pent-up hostility explodes in a full scale riot.

One thing that is striking about this film is how civilized the prison seems, compared to the prisons in US films. There are several riots, but despite director Ringo Lam's in-your-face style, they still seem less rowdy than the average American football game. It seems that HK jails just don't have the same 'jungle' reputation US jails have.

The best reason to see this movie is Chow Yun Fat. Chow gives a great performance as the happy go lucky Ah. He gets to show the range of his acting, proving to US audiences that he can play roles other than those we've seen in John Woo films. In *Prison on Fire 2* he gets to do straight drama, action, and some comedy too. It's no wonder this guy is one of the biggest actors in Asia.

*Prison on Fire 2* is also an eye-opening film for Americans who may only be familiar with Ringo Lam from the rather lack-luster *Maximum Risk*. Though *Prison on Fire 2* is not considered to be one of his major works, this is still a darn good film. It is well focused, despite the number of different plot elements the script includes, and the action scenes are pretty darn intense. *Prison on Fire 2* pushes all the right buttons, and we recommend it to anyone who likes HK films, or wants to explore the genre. (by Scott Hamilton and Chris Holland of Stomp Tokyo)

**Professionals, The (Hong Kong, 1998: Tong Wai-Sing)** - This low-rent action flick features some decent names, but after that it's all downhill. Louis Koo is a cop sent to find a gang of robbers. Along the way, he teams with the idiotic mainland cops led by the most uncharismatic Chinese actor ever. The big bad guy is Norman Tsui, who's one of those honorable villains who values kids and old ladies.

Then, one hour into the film, it happens. You realize that this is a remake of *Heat*! And it's an incredibly bad remake, too! When you realize that Louis Koo is supposed to be Al Pacino and Norman Tsui is supposed to be Robert De Niro, the horror sets in. Ada Choi gets the Amy Brenneman role, and she has very little to do. She's a fashion designer, so there's a detour to a fashion show with the most horrid looking models ever. The last thirty minutes are a direct lift from *Heat*, down to the hotel assassination and bank robbery. There is just no chemistry between Louis Koo and Norman Tsui. Chemistry? This movie is so awful that it's a joke to even consider thinking about chemistry. (by Kozo of LoveHkFilm.com)

**Project A (Hong Kong, 1983: Jackie Chan)** - While Jackie Chan's previous film *Dragon Lord* (1982) did not have as much local success as Chan wanted\* his next film *Project A* would be an artistic and commercial success. It is the maturation point for Jackie as a filmmaker and would start a string of successes that would help establish Chan as an action auteur. He directed, starred, co-written and even hired two "brothers" in Sammo Hung and Yuen Biao (they had grown up together in the same opera troupe and performed as the Seven Little Fortunes amongst others; Sammo was already an established success at this time and certainly is a prodigious presence in this movie) in the first film where they all had decent acting time -- kudos to those who can name the first film they acted in together.

Dragon Ma (Jackie Chan) is a sergeant in the Hong Kong Water Police where pirates are problematic on the coastline (they would remain an issue even past WWII), his department is poorly financed, there are interdepartmental squabbles with the landlubber police and their haughty commander Captain Chi (Kwan Hoi-San) and his nephew Inspector Hong Tin Chi (Yuen Biao: Knockabout) and they just had their remaining ships blown up real good (nice model sets in that scene). Project A is the codename to combat these buccaneers. However, it looks bad for the Water Police when they get merged back into the main police force and there is a plot to steal rifles and be sold to the pirates headed by Lo San Po (Dick Wei: The Five Venoms) who ultimately does not seem that bad to me. Later the pirates make the ultimate mistake in kidnapping a ship with a Rear Admiral aboard and take them hostage. This leads to Dragon Ma eventually teaming up with wayward thief and gambler Fei (Sammo Hung) and Inspector Hong to combat these irascible swashbucklers.

There are several stunts in this movie that are truly amazing. Much has been stated about the clock tower fall inspired by Harold Lloyd in *Safety Last* and with good reason. It is a superlative stunt and still one of my favorites as well as Jackie too. Jackie hangs by a clock hand about 50 feet above the surface and lets go to crash through two cloth awnings until the rude smacking into the ground proving that gravity is indeed a harsh mistress. It would be the first "superstunt" Jackie would do in a film and which would soon be a reoccurring theme in his movies to risk his life to please the audience. All three takes of this life-threatening drop are available to see on the film: two are shown in the movie and one is shown in the outtakes at the end. Every take looks quite painful. Leading up to this situation is another quick stunt that was quite dangerous. He climbs a flag pole to the top while handcuffed so he can unwrap himself from that mast and escape his predicament. But you look at how high he is from the concrete floor below and realize that if he messes this stunt it could be much worse than the fall through the awnings.

The comedic fighting in this film is also quite adroit and amazing in its action direction led by Jackie and Sammo. The first scene between the water and land police is a crazy melee of kung fu, throwing objects and spaghetti. It is quite reminiscent of an updated western bar fight. The Keatonesque bicycle chase and action sequence is a brilliant combination of the two. While the scene certainly had been influenced by such films as *Sherlock Jr.*, especially in the bicycle camera view towards the end, Jackie gives it such a unique touch that makes it such an aesthetically pleasing and entertaining spectacle. Add in several other fight scenes and a fantastic finale with the three brothers and the antagonist and you have quite a satisfying film.

Project A was a hit in Hong Kong (19M HK dollars box office) and found critical support there as well. Jackie Chan would be nominated for Best Actor for Hong Kong Film Award; however, this film would win Best Action Design (Jackie Chan's Stuntman Association was even nominated against itself that year in *Wheels on Meals*) an award it truly deserved. It is also an important film for Hong Kong cinema. It helped push action movies into modern day locales and away from the Qing era and before dominated themes (though this film is considered a period film since it takes place in early 20th century).

While the film may not know what to do with female characters like Wong Man-Ying and the plot is not the most sublimely cohesive -- there is a grenade scene early in the film which seemed a bit excessive, not that funny and did not seem to fit -- this film is consistently fun and beautifully directed (cinematographer Cheung Yiu-Jo does not get enough credit for the work he has done with Jackie Chan). Action aficionados certainly talk about this film though it is somewhat overshadowed by *Police Story* (one of my favorite films) when they discuss the oeuvre of Jackie Chan. With the humor, the dangerous stunts with complete disregard for human life and the awesome action scenes it is easy to recommend this. I certainly love this film and find multiple viewings rewarding. There does remain one question that I will resolve soon: which film is better: this or the sequel?

The DVD I have of this movie is the slightly antiquated Media Asia R0 which is uncut but not as preferable as the R2 HKL release or the R3 Fortune Star release if you are region free. I do prefer it over the Dimension release which is cut, dubbed-only and a modified score. You can find a variety of links explaining the differences between the uncut and the Disney release but all you need to know is that the end credits are cut (like in *Dragon Lord*). Anyone who would cut the "outtakes" of these movies does not understand the audience who would purchase these DVDs. One huge negative of this is that you miss one take of the clock tower fall where things do not go quite right.

\* I feel it has been overstated as being a flop since it was a success in Japan and made a modest amount of money in Hong Kong. The idea that this film was a flop was possibly done to increase the stature of Project A, but regardless Project A is a seminal movie in the history of Hong Kong cinema. I do think if Golden Harvest had any qualms about helping finance this film the presence of Sammo Hung during one of his most popular periods certainly soothed any worries. (by Masterofoneinchpunch of KFF)

**Project A II (Hong Kong, 1987: Jackie Chan)** - Sequels are a capricious lot with most nowhere near the stature of the original. Sometimes you find a sequel that is considered better than the original, some critics (such as John Charles)



have stated that Project A2 is better than the original, I disagree somewhat but this movie is still a worthwhile follow-up and fits well in the output of brilliant Hong Kong action cinema in the 1980s as well as Jackie's own oeuvre. I do wonder how with such an awesome release of great films that his later films were not as good. He only has directed two films in the 1990s and none past that, but he has had much clout in many of the films where he is not officially the director.

Earlier in 1987 Jackie had brain surgery following a disastrous fall in the filming of *Armour of God*. This encouraged him to work on his next film close to home. This did not encourage him to stop risking his life and his stunt team for our amusement. What resulted is a smash hit at home that eclipsed the original in box office tallies (31 million HK dollars compared to 19 million for the original).

Jackie Chan is once again police officer extraordinaire Dragon Ma and he is ordered to work with "Three Wan" Superintendent Chun (Lam Wai, *Royal Warriors*) who is the only Chinese police officer allowed to have a gun yet is thought to be staging arrests to make himself look better and ignoring the crimes of a triad lord named Tiger Au (Michael Chan Wai-Man, *Dragon Lord*). Apparently Chun has too much power to be taken down directly, but he is relieved of the Sai Wan district (now he is "Two Wan") which Dragon Ma takes over. This inefficient and corrupt office will soon get a makeover and there is a great scene where three officers, who do not know who they are dealing with, attempt to assault Ma to teach him a lesson about complaining about police officers. He soon has that district ship-shape and Tiger Au taken care of. The fight choreography and stunts with Tiger and his men are quite awesome. My favorite stunt was a beautifully brutal fall from the second floor into a large vase and that vase did not appear to be soft.

Meanwhile a couple of subplots are happening. There are pirates who have survived from the first film who are looking for revenge and food. Then there are revolutionaries including Maggie (Maggie Cheung, *In The Mood For Love*) and (Rosamund Kwan, *Casino Raiders*) who are trying to raise funds for Dr. Sun Yat-sen to overthrow the Qing Government as well as government operatives who are trying to find these rebels.\* Throw in a mixture of corrupt Hong Kong and British Cops as well as legitimate ones and you have a stew that is getting a bit too many ingredients, but yet still seems to coalesce. This works well when there is a Marx Brothers influenced scene (the Marx Brothers have done this type of scene a few times with *The Cocoanuts* (1929) being the first) at Maggie's place where everyone is looking for someone while hiding from someone else. Many weeks were spent on this scene alone and the effort certainly shows.

There are several faults with the film. There is a certain didactic nature that creeps in the film that seems a bit out-of-place – especially one small speech towards the end that Jackie gives when dealing with the Mainland revolutionaries\*\* and the extremely easy conversion of the pirates that survived from the first film. Female characters are once again underused and underappreciated, especially Maggie Cheung. I was not as satisfied with the continuance of the plot as much as the first film either. The individual scenes dominate my feelings for the film instead of thinking of this movie as a cohesive whole. I do not fault the film for not being able to have Sammo Hung and Yuen Biao like the first though (I have heard the main reason behind this was that those two were filming *Eastern Condors*, but I do wonder if Jackie could have waited a small while to get them to perform in this – they would work together for the last time the following year in *Dragons Forever*), but they are missed.

I found this to be quite an enjoyable and well-made film and it is rightfully regarded as one of the better comedic action films of the 1980s. This film is also quite good in a few unexpected places. The art direction is superb (Eddie Ma Poon-chiu), the costumes are exquisite, the cinematography is good and the movie looks quite authentic. But the stunts, comedy and the action is what I remember this film for. There is a chase involving a handcuffed Dragon and Chun that is superb (part of the axe throwing scene would be used in *Shanghai Noon*). The last twenty minutes is full of awe-inspiring hits, falls, chili-peppers as a mouth-mace (Jackie writes in his autobiography about how he used real peppers in this scene; you can see him in a lot of mouth pain during the outtakes at the end) and is a worthy conclusion to this movie. The most famous stunt from this sequence is his homage to Buster Keaton from *Steamboat Bill Jr.* (1928) with the exception that there is no hole and only a weak section where his head pops through.

Fans of Jackie and/or Hong Kong action cinema should consider this a must own and watch. I certainly do.

I have two editions of this film the Dimension R1 and the Mega Star R0. The Dimension R1 is English Dub only (with many hilarious Aussie voices), has dubtitles, has a Golden Harvest title instead of Golden Way Films, is missing the beginning scenes from the first film (replaced by English titles and credits) and has a little bit cut from the early pirate scene (possibly other cuts but the running times are similar). To me the print does not seem that much better than the Mega Star release which I easily prefer over those two. The OOP R2 HKL release looks to be the best

release out there with the ubiquitous Bey Logan commentary and several other extras not found elsewhere. Since it is OOP the prices tend to be a bit high though.

\* If you were going to date this film it is important to know that the Empress Dowager who is mentioned in this movie died in 1908 and the assassination of Governor En-ming (not mentioned by name in the subtitles) and the Kiangsi/Kwangtung uprisings took place in December of 1906 so most likely the movie takes place in 1907 (information obtained from the book China's Republican Revolution: the case of Kwangtung, 1895-1913 (1975) by Edward J. M. Rhoads).

\*\*It is interesting to compare these comments with Jackie's later actions and statements which are more situated to Chinese Mainland hegemony than with Hong Kong allegiance. The statement made by the Mainland revolutionary Ms. Pak slightly earlier in this scene "But this decaying colonial system..." certainly echoed the current countdown toward the handover. However, Jackie does a fine job of portraying the many ethnic groups fairly. For example, while there are the treacherous British, the Commissioner (Bozidar Smiljanic) is played as a solid individual and certainly cares for his daughter Regina (Regina Kent). (by Masterofoneinchpunch of KFF)

**Project S (Hong Kong, 1993: Stanley Tong) – Supercop 2; Once a Cop** - As a crime wave sweeps through Hong Kong, the police call on Jessica Yang, a rising star in their ranks, to help stop a notorious gang of thieves.

Being a suitor to Michelle Yeoh should require passing a mandatory physical exam that includes beating her in a fight. I would say... good luck with that! I really enjoyed the fights as well as the action in this movie, and it wasn't as melodramatic as I thought it would be. However, the plot is still fairly... average. Also always great to see the hugely underrated Rongguang Yu kicking ass in a movie!

The first fight sequence happens pretty much when the movie opens, and we are treated to a hostage situation. Loved that part, cutting between credits and nice stunts, can't not like that. The incredible Yukari Ôshima is wasted, but oh well. Rest is awesome!

Next, we have an action sequence at the terrorists' place, and Michelle Yeoh kicks all kinds of ass there, along with Fan Siu-Wong who is quite the acrobat.

The thing that's quite annoying in this movie however is that shoot-outs last a while, hundreds of bullets are shot, and yet no one actually hits each other until very late in the movie. Really makes it quite... impossible, especially when assault rifles are involved. I don't watch these movies for realism of course but most of the characters weren't even taking cover and nobody was getting shot.

Next there's a sort of skirmish at Michelle's place (her neighbors), and Dick Wei makes his first fighting appearance (love this guy).

Finally, the final sequence is all kinds of awesome, with Dick Wei fighting Fan Siu-Wong in a lovely fight I will definitely watch again, and Michelle, well... wow this fight I loved it! She fights some huge tower-guy and yet, the sequence works so well!

By the moment she was hitting him from a table to propel herself up I knew I was watching something truly special. This is a fight you don't wanna miss!

Rongguang Yu has a short fight near the end but nothing more (what a shame).

Stunts - 90/100 | Typical Hong Kong awesome stuff. I don't know how else to describe them at this point.

Narrative - 60/100 | "Now... YOU DIE!" enough said.

Fight Choreography - 91/100 | Michelle Yeoh fights a guy that's twice as tall and large as she is and wins in a way that isn't contrived or ridiculous, but actually amazing.

Enjoyment - 68/100 | Movie is a bit uneven in terms of pacing, story, development, and somewhat melodramatic, but it's kinda fun I guess? Watch it for the action.

Overall 72/100

If you're a fan of HK action movies, this is a good one. (by Daxtreme of KFF)

**Promising Young Boy (Taiwan, 1987: Wu Kuo-Hsiao)** - Taiwanese film about the Taiwanese National Tae Kwon Do team training to take on the Koreans. It's basically *Best of the Best* with a climax out of *No Retreat, No Surrender*, with Alexander Lo Rei filling in for Van Damme. Don Wong Tao shows up as the coach, although he doesn't fight. The fights are choreographed by Lo Rei and Lee Hoi Hing, who worked on the much-loathed Iron Monkey 2. A young Collin Chou and Lo Rei steal the show with their gravity-defying bootwork. The finale has both men at the top of their game. (by Blake Matthews)

**Protector, The (USA, 1985: James Glickenhaus)** - Director James Glickenhaus and Hollywood's second attempt to break Jackie Chan into the American market, starts at night in the Bronx, with some bad guys who look like they just came from the set of 'Escape From New York' robbing a truck of computers - Detectives Billy Wong (Jackie) and his partner get there too late, so they go and have a beer instead and end up squaring off with different hoodlums. Lots of overly ridiculous shooting of guns and no kung fu, as Jackie's partner is killed and one of the bad guys gets away. Cool Charlie's Angels pinball machine though.

"Gimme the f\*ckin' keys," Jackie tells the guy at the dock, so he can chase after the killer. Wow! This was worth it just to see that!

Jackie meets his new partner, a younger, skinnier Danny Aiello and they make small talk, where Jackie is a jaded, tough-talking cop. As bad as this movie is in terms of Glickenhaus' overwrought story and cliched action (typical angry Police Captain, last straw, etc.), I kinda like seeing Jackie in this role....

Anyway, they end up having to go to Hong Kong after the bad guys, who kidnapped some hotshots daughter. "Discretion is my middle name," says Jackie. He's got some classic funny lines in this.

Then they go to a massage parlor where we see a naked lady, and Danny Aiello is about to get a happy ending ("Hey! When did you grow a beard?"), but Jackie's masseuse is about to give him a knife in the back and finally we get to see Jackie fight a little bit. It's somewhat like the scene in Rush Hour 2 at the massage place, except it looks like it was filmed by someone who didn't know what they were doing.

"Gimme a break", Jackie tells Moon Lee, who's English actually sounds pretty good.

Moon Lee's dad is offed, they consult a Chinese fortune teller, naked women prepare the 'product', there's a story 'twist'...and a portable cannon.

"Listen you creep", Jackie tells the bad guy over the phone, after they try to pay them off, "It's not your money we want. It's your ass!"

At the end we get Jackie vs Bill Wallace and some of what I can only assume are some of his stunt men and then Jackie with a big crane. *The Protector* did \$981,000 at the box office and finished #65 of all the R rated movies of 1985 and #152 of ALL movies in 1985. THAT is a flop. In a weird way though... I kinda liked it.

(HK Version) Jackie had a cut of the movie done for Hong Kong, where he took out all of the nudity and he added some side story about Sally Yeh as some synchronized aerobics dancer with a talisman necklace of some significance. He tries to talk to her about it and has to fight two guys who've been vying for her attention. It's a Jackie Chan-ish style fight in a weight room, that doesn't last very long, isn't all that creative, and only slightly better than what was in the film. He visits her a little later and finds a bomb in her apartment that he defuses himself, before the bad guys try and shoot them with machine guns through the door. He then takes her to the airport. Jackie also adds a scene of Bill Wallace fighting, that shows how they kill Moon Lee's characters dad. Sally Yeh's cute, but I like the U.S. version better. Jackie should make his own tough cop movie. (by Chazgower01 of KFF)

**Proud and Confident (Hong Kong, 1989: Lee King-Chu)** - For those who have viewed their share of Hong Kong films plus Hollywood fare, this 1989 action offering out of "the Eastern Hollywood" is likely to instill a sense of deja vu. For one thing, it has at least one scene in which Andy Lau is clad in a sparkling white singlet (sleeveless undershirt). Other visions involving the Lee King Chue helmed work's lead actor that should be familiar to Jade Theatre fans are

those that have him scrounging up his face in order to look emotionally tormented as well as in the kind of tight fitting trousers that can make one fear that he's fated to have an ultra low sperm count.

On a less trivial note, and despite its focusing on essentially ground-based forces, *PROUD AND CONFIDENT* also possesses a lot of elements that make it come across as an Asian version of "Top Gun" (rather than just a pioneering "Best of the Best" themed effort). E.g., its focus on a group of mainly young men (including, in this case, Dick Wei's impressively built "Popeye" and Francis Ng's largely unsmiling "He-Man" characters) who are: reckoned to be the cream of their particular uniformed body's crop; brought to be trained to become a really crack unit (chiefly by David Lam Wai's commanding Chiu character); and get involved in situations whereby they are called to protect less physically able others as well as prove themselves.

Also, although Andy Lau's at least initially overly cocky Inspector Wah character is a police officer rather than a navy pilot, there is little question that he was modeled after Tom Cruise's 'Maverick' character. And while there isn't really a true equivalent in *PROUD AND CONFIDENT* to Val Kilmer's 'Iceman' for its sharp-shooting specialist protagonist to feel a burning need to individually out do in training and beyond, he does get provided with: a faithful best buddy (in Miu Kiu Wai's character -- a family man who shares the same personal name as the actor who played him) who should bring to mind the married 'Goose' Bradshaw character in the 1986 hit movie; and also a course instructor turned romantic interest (Rosamund Kwan's Chief Inspector Jennifer Tang had initially looked like she would have a bigger role than Kelly McGillis had had but, to my disappointment, turned out to not have a truly significant part to play in this testosterone packed offering).

If one can leave aside all this derivatively together with the plot predictability that they engender, however, *PROUD AND CONFIDENT* is capable of being at least watchable and actually exciting in parts. One reason for this is that it does have its share of action scenes. And it definitely helps that they constitute a pretty wide range -- from an appetite whetting one involving child hostages and a madman who seems to think that he's the Monkey King (played by Peter Chan Lung) all the way to pitched gun battles that look to be among the closest thing to military combat that will be seen in a movie that's set in late twentieth century Hong Kong.

IMHO, there also is some entertainment to be derived from seeing what inadvertently as well as consciously localizing details this film's makers came up with to situate this parable against over-confidence -- that nonetheless emphasizes the need for people to take pride in their work, selves plus chosen peer group -- in their home territory. Relatedly, this (re)viewer couldn't help but notice with some retrospective interest how openly this pre-Handover offering was apt to wear its native community's then contemporary concerns about what the future would bring on its sleeve (And likewise re its xenophobia -- since the main enemy force in *PROUD AND CONFIDENT* wasn't only an international crime syndicate but also one that looks to have an English-speaking "gweilo" head (Eddie Maher) as well as was otherwise composed of Vietnamese former soldiers at that). (by YTSL of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Punch to Revenge, A (Hong Kong, 1989: Lee Chiu) - *Aka Angel of Kickboxer*** - Yukari Oshima plays Miss Fan, a social worker whose current cases include that of a Mr. Tseng (Eddie Ko Hung). Mr. Tseng is an immigrant from the Mainland who lives in a small apartment with his wife and child, who's mentally retarded. During this flight across the border, Tseng was stopped by some soldiers, who smashed his leg with poles and now he walks with a limp. That has hindered him from getting a good job—or any job, for that matter—and now his wife turns tricks to make ends meet. Tseng is quickly getting tired of his wife sleeping with strangers to pay the bills, and is getting more and more violent about his disapproval of his wife's current profession. Fan acts as a mediator between the two, but one violent outburst gets Tseng arrested.

While pleading for his to be let off the hook, Fan meets Peter Lee (Ben Lam), a detective with the CID. The two develop a romantic relationship, but things will quickly get hairy for them. You see, four Mainlanders from Tseng's village have undoubtedly watched *The Long Arm of the Law* and think they can succeed where their forebears failed: sneak into Hong Kong, carry off some robbery jobs, and return to the Mainland as rich as kings. A hesitant Tseng hooks them up with Officer Hung (Chan Ging), a former police officer whose legitimate loan shark business is a front for his arms dealing. Hung gives the four men weapons and tells them at that if they can successfully knock off a jewelry store.

Before the heist is pulled off, Peter and Fan see Tseng, Hung and the four Mainlanders at a restaurant, and Peter suspects that something is up. This chance meeting also brings Fan into the conflict, as Hung sick his goons on her for fear that her relationship with Tseng might come back to bite him in the rear. The Mainlanders successfully rob the jewelry store, only to be double-crossed by Hung afterward. He then tries to play them against Tseng and the police, and from there, things will only spiral further out of control, especially once Miss Fan comes into possession of incriminating evidence against Officer Hung.

What I liked most about this film is how I cared more about the characters and their plights than I did most other Girls n' Guns films, even the more lauded ones like *Blonde Fury* and the *In the Line of Duty* films. Eddie Ko gives an especially sensitive performance as Tseng, who hates how his lot in life has ended up with his wife working as a hooker, and how he feels that only crime—which he's reluctant to get involved with in the first place—is the only way he'll be able to make a fresh start. Yukari Oshima also gives a sympathetic performance as Miss Fan, a nice departure from the tomboyish, tough or androgynous characters she frequently plays in her movies. Ben Lam is likable as the main hero and Chan Ging plays a risible villain. Stanley Fung, in an extended cameo as Ben's superior, plays his role straight (as opposed to, say, Richard Ng in *In the Line of Duty III*) and is fine.

Yukari Oshima gets three one vs. many fights in this movie. She first takes on a bunch of thugs in a car garage, as the lead thug (played by choreographer Ridley Tsui) trying to run her down with his car (which I assume is where Bruce Law participated the most in the choreography). She pulls off some solid kicks and punches, ending with a jumping spin kick that becomes a falling knee smash against Ridley. Later, she storms Officer Hung's office in a red sweatsuit and kicks the hell out of his men. She does some nice kick-ups and cartwheels off the desks in the room, and her axe kick is especially powerful. Also, watch for when she does a crescent kick over a guy's head, only to front kick him in the stomach afterward. Finally, she has a fight with the same goons in her apartment, which is a particularly intense fight. Furniture is used to assist in acrobatic kicks, as bludgeons, and a something for the players to fall into and break. People are thrown into walls and light fixtures and even an aquarium is broken during the course of the brawl. It's not necessarily Oshima's best moment, but it's a good fight.

Sadly, her character is severely injured and exits the story with 15 minutes left, which is where the film gets especially brutal. The last five minutes, where Ben Lam fights the Mainland robbers, gets pretty bloody. All in all, some good fighting from Yukari Oshima (and Ben Lam, for that better), good performances all around, and a strong human element make this one of the better films of its sub-genre. Worth a look! (by Blake Matthews)

**Purple Storm (Hong Kong, 1999: Teddy Chan)** - With the declining box office for HK films, HK filmmakers have turned their desperate eyes eastward towards the Promised Land of Hollywood. Hollywood films have made large inroads all over Asia and are financially impacting the HK film industry in a very negative way. But as the old saying goes "if you can't beat them, join them" and a number of HK films have been produced over the past few years that are trying to be more "Hollywood" type productions. They have higher budgets, utilize CGI for special effects and tend to be slick action films in the tradition of Hollywood summer fare. The results thus far have been mixed – the films have in fact recaptured some of the box office, but the films have been met with resistance and disdain from many HK film fans for various reasons.

*Purple Storm* definitely falls into this Hollywood influenced genre of action films, but it has a depth and a complexity that films like *A Man Called Hero* and *Gen-X Cops* did not even approach. I am not talking *Ashes of Time* complexity here – but the film doesn't feel as if it will blow away with the first breeze to come along. This is more than just a bunch of ex-fashion models strutting their stuff down the runway and changing clothes as often as possible. For one thing, there are a few veteran actors who give weight to the film and the new ones do a fine job – with one of them being very impressive.

Director Teddy Chan (*Downtown Torpedoes*) gets the film off to an explosive start and the film rarely looks back. The first thirty minutes of the film is admittedly a bit shaky as it feels like the filmmakers were afraid the audience would be bored if they added any expository to the scenes. So the audience is left in the dark to some degree as to why the attack on the boat takes place, what is the building that gets blown up and why and how do the cops know where the terrorists are hiding. The film though is moving so quickly that you just brush these thoughts away and eventually the film settles down into an intriguing, fast moving and focused narrative. Clearly, in a film like this, one doesn't expect a lot of time and celluloid to be expended on character development – and that is the case here – but still within the confines of an action flick I thought the characters (both the good and bad guys) went beyond being simply one dimensional cardboard characters.

Movies are always looking for new characters bent on world destruction and here in a different twist, the villain is a former Khmer Rouge assassin - Soong (played by Kam Kwok-leung). He has developed a chemical that when exploded in the atmosphere will mix with the rain and cause a deathly Purple Storm to fall upon the earth. As the Khmer Rouge attempted to do in Cambodia, he wants to take the world back to Ground Zero and begin society all over again.

His son, played by newcomer Daniel Wu, and Josie Ho are smuggling the chemical into HK on board a ship. In the opening scene, the crew attacks them and in a well-done action scene the two of them dispatch the crew in various ways. Josie Ho impresses immediately with her silent, ruthless and ferocious killing style. Her scenes in this film are kinetic and you are left wanting to see a lot more of her than this film offers. In the fight, Wu smashes his head, is

knocked out and left behind. The police – led by Emil Chow and with Moses Chan and Patrick Tam as two of his men – capture him, but when they attempt to question him they learn that he has completely lost his memory.

The film proceeds into some interesting and morally gray territory here, as the police eventually allow psychiatrist Joan Chen to hypnotize Wu and re-program him with an entirely different life. Chow ponders whether they have the right to play God and program a man to kill his own father – but decides that for the greater good he must do it. They make Wu believe that he is “good” and that he was an undercover cop who had infiltrated the terrorist group. The police set him loose to either kill Soong or be killed. Wu is soon back among the terrorists and as images of his past start to flood through his mind he becomes more and more confused. Who is he? What is he? A killer or a cop. Wu does a fine job of portraying a man lost within himself – trying to come to terms with who he really is. His scenes with Josie and Soong have a sad and tragic intensity to them.

Still, in the final analysis this is an action film and though none of these stars are known for their action abilities, it still looks pretty good due to some sharp editing. Most of the action is gunplay and the scenes are well choreographed with some enjoyable and deadly moments (often courtesy of Josie). One area in which one has to suspend their disbelief is just how efficient the terrorists are. Their planning is so letter perfect that the poor cops are often left floundering and picking up their dead. At one point I was thinking if this was a football game, the score would be Terrorists 27, Police 0. Game suspended.

I enjoyed everyone’s performance. Joan Chen – making a rare appearance in a HK film – is suitably cool and prescient; Emil Chow is very solid as the dedicated and relentless cop, Kam Kwok-leung adds layers to his fanatical character, Wu was much better than I expected and Josie Ho in an almost non-speaking role simply burns up the screen with a smoldering intensity.

All in all, this is a fairly enjoyable piece of entertainment that is light years from high art – but is quite satisfactory in what it sets out to do. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Queen's High (Hong Kong, 1991: Chris Lee)** - It’s surprising no-one has mentioned the similarity this 1991 pic has to *Kill Bill*, especially given QT’s liking, both for lifting plots and Hong Kong movies. Here, Cynthia Khan plays Kwanny, the daughter in a gangster family whose wedding day is interrupted by the treacherous slaughter of her intended (and a good few others). Thus explodes a spiral of revenge and betrayal, in which she gets plenty of chance to use her martial arts and gun skills. Of course, there are differences – she is unaware of her enemy within – but the overlap is striking. No doubt Tarantino will claim not to have heard of it – any more than he’d seen *City on Fire*, before making *Reservoir Dogs*...

On its own merits, Queen’s High stands up nicely, after a sluggish start. You might be wondering how to keep track of a parade of characters, but don’t worry, they won’t last long. The wedding-day slaughter on its own gets it our seal of approval, a masterpiece of slo-mo squibbing that’s in my personal top ten of action heroine sequences, and brings a new meaning to “until death do us part”. It also lets Cynthia Khan, who has her share of acting talent, transform from happy daughter to avenging angel, as during *In the Line of Duty 3*. The action side finally bursts into life in the final reel, Kwanny taking on a whole warehouse of bad guys, and discovering who ordered the massacre. The film certainly has weaknesses, but such strengths easily make up for them. (by Girls With Guns.Org)

**Raiders of Loesing Treasure (Taiwan, 1992: Wang Yao) - aka Thunder Mission** - How can so many ninjas perform so incompetently? They do, at least, succeed in killing an unarmed attorney alone in his office. This low budget Taiwanese film manages to pack in more action sequences than most, yet somehow they mostly fall flat. Compounding the lack of martial skill are scenes such as that in which Michiko and her screen half-sister actually pause mid-fight to resolve their family differences while the action rages around them!

The film’s premise rests on a sexist bet by three male interior decorators concerning who can date the first woman they meet. This happens to be Michiko’s character “Annie Wang.” She appears in slow motion, a vision of loveliness wearing a formal suit, fully accessorized, with flowing hair. It has been claimed that the budget for this film was so low that Michiko supplied her own wardrobe. If so, it’s a testament to her good taste, and one of the better aspects of the film.

Annie Wang is the director of a software company who lives with her mother. Her company becomes the target of a Japanese terrorist group, played by familiar Taiwanese action actors. It turns out that Annie’s half-sister “Hsian” is married to “Suzuki” – the Japanese terrorist mastermind. By the movie’s close, Hsian discovers Suzuki’s treachery and is reunited with Annie.

Much of the film is taken up with the mildly comic antics of one of the interior decorators "Shin" (Alex Fong) who, encouraged by his adoptive father (Wu Ma), attempts to seduce Annie. She needs protection from the terrorist attacks, and Shin's kung fu skills help save the day and win the girl. Perhaps Annie could have thought to call the police instead.

Compounding this stereotype is the caricatured portrayal of Annie's female assistant, driver and bodyguard "Little Pepper" as the butt of sexist "humor." An apparently competent martial arts performer, she's also required to endure dating jokes and establish her toughness by out-drinking the males.

There are nevertheless several solid fight sequences along the way. Wearing a tight skirt and heels, Michiko fights off a gang of assailants on a flight of stairs, displaying powerful punching and kicks as well as impressive gymnastics. Later, Michiko performs a kip on a car roof. Both women show strong martial arts moves, but it's not as fast or spectacular as the best of the genre.

The various elements – being attacked in the office, a car fire-bombed, Annie's mother being killed, a nocturnal raid on an arms cache – are fair but formulaic. They have been performed too often in other films. The final fight is predictable and lacking tension, although Michiko throws some great kicks – noticeably higher than usual, with some powerful roundhouse and hook kicks. Both she and her assistant Little Pepper are the ones to watch, and credit is due to the latter performer – not only for her solid martial arts skills but also for her ability to generate elements of a screen partnership with Michiko's character. No other female actor achieved this.

However, the closing scene sums up the very conventional nature of this film. Three of the male and three of the female heroes survive. They immediately pair up. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Real Me, The (Hong Kong, 1991: Chow Wah-Yu)** - An undercover cop (Kong Wa) on a mission to steal incriminating computer discs from a Triad gang suffers a head injury after a car chase and develops amnesia. He is attacked in hospital by the Triad gang and narrowly escapes. Fleeing from both the gang and the police, he is rescued by Michiko. She is his lover, and there are some relatively explicit (but not graphic) sexual scenes. She is a Japanese who works for another gang headed by her father. She reports to his house and changes into a traditional kimono. She is later abducted and held for ransom by the gang that is attempting to recover the discs.

During the second half of the film Michiko's lover begins to recover elements of his memory. He returns to visit his wife (Kara Hui Ying-Hung). Later, distraught over the death of her police officer brother (Chin Siu Ho) who is killed by the hero to preserve his cover, she beats on him. Then they embrace – only to be discovered by Michiko. There is a good fight scene between Michiko – who throws several powerful roundhouse kicks – and Kara, who performs an impressive kip. After Kara is knocked down in the road she is killed by an oncoming truck. A hit is ordered on Michiko and her lover. In a doomed confrontation they are outnumbered by gang members, and Michiko is shot, dying in her lover's arms.

Michiko has considerable screen time in this film, and several brief fight scenes. Although not one of her most striking roles, she is nevertheless pleasing to watch. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Red Shield (Hong Kong, 1991: Parkman Wong)** - This is fairly standard action fare for early 1990's Hong Kong films. Particularly for Danny Lee vehicles. Lee is perhaps most famous for his role as the cop in the classic John Woo film *The Killer*, but his career went back to the Shaw Brothers where he appeared in kung-fu films (as did every one) but also what have become cult films (*Oily Maniac*, *Bruce Lee and I*, *The Mighty Peking Man*, *The Super Inframan*). He hit his stride though with contemporary gun and butter policier in which he was almost always the police. And his solid noble tenacious cops became part of the Hong Kong film landscape. In fact, Lee was a bit of a police groupie in real life hanging out with cops, getting awards from them for his positive portrayals and riding with cops on patrol. But that all added to his reputation as the go-to cop actor.

In *Red Shield* Lee is in charge of a task force after a vicious gang of smugglers. The gang consists of some good bad guys if that makes sense - actors who generally take those roles - Ben Lam as the head and his two main henchmen Jackson Lau and the wonderful Yuen Wah who trained in childhood with Sammo, Yuen Biao and Jackie and appeared in many of their films - again almost always as a villain - he just had that sort of face. But this is basically a shoot-em-up film and Yuen Wah is kind of wasted because his real skills were in his astonishing acrobatics.

Lee and his group think they have the gang trapped on the shore but they escape by boat into the Mainland - which as always back then comes off as a haven for criminals and idiot cops. But the gang comes back to Hong Kong for a face-off with a rival triad head (Yay Shing Fu-on or as he was nicknamed "Silly Big Head"). During their shoot out,

another cop happens by and kills one of Lam's men. This is Leung Kar-yan. Danny and Leung team up to go after the gang. All good. Lots of gunfire. Lots of dead bodies. We like that.

But the film goes badly askew by introducing the wives of these two cops (the very well-known Teresa Mo and the lesser known but very cute Yip San). Teresa is having a baby but Danny has no time for her and Leung suspects that his wife is cheating on him and follows her around. It is corny and annoying and takes up a good chunk of the film and completely breaks the tension and rhythm of the film. In fact such a chunk that you know at some point the gang will threaten them and sure enough.

There are better Danny Lee films out there - The Untold Story, Organized Crime & Triad Bureau, Shoot to Kill, Love to Kill, Run and Kill etc. etc. and of course The Killer. My rule for cop films is keep out the women unless they are cops or killers. Or blind singers.

Btw - not that I recognized him but a very young Nick Cheung who is a pretty big star today is one of the junior cops. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Red Fists (Hong Kong, 1991: Guo Ba-Chang) - aka Perfect Partners; Joint Investigation** - Ouch!! That was my main reaction to this almost non-stop action film that has some of the most painful looking falls I have seen in a Hong Kong film. There is a constant barrage of guys getting hit and falling onto hard objects - often far below - and it looks very real and very stressful. Yu Rong Guang, who was also responsible for the choreography of these falls, doesn't spare himself either. He takes a couple very hard knocks and one in particular was a doozy. Filmed in one shot - he jumps out of a second floor window - falls on to the ledge below - rolls off on to a car far below - bounces off of that and lands finally on the hard pavement. No damage done of course but don't try it at home!

Clearly this film believes that if something is not happening on screen that involves a car racing through the streets, people chasing after others, gunfights full of shattering glass or people getting beaten to a pulp it is not worth filming. Of the ninety minute running time, I would have to estimate that at least seventy minutes of it is devoted to some sort of action - or the lead up to action. There are only a couple of scenes that are presented to establish character - one involving a bonding over eating dog meat - and they are done with as quickly as possible to get back to the good stuff. This was fine with me since there was nothing particularly original about the plot or the characters.

Cops in Hong Kong are attempting to track down some counterfeiters, while at the same time unknown to them the cops in the Mainland are doing the same. In HK the investigation is being headed up by Sharon Kwok who in my opinion has one of the best smiles in HK films - her lip curls in a most attractive way. At any rate it isn't her curling upper lip that stops crime but instead a lethal trigger finger and some nice kung fu moves. I am not sure if Sharon's martial arts training went beyond being married to Chin Sui Ho for a few years - but she manages to look fairly good in her fight scenes - with the help no doubt of some imaginative editing.

Going undercover in the Mainland is Yu Rong Guang and he is able to infiltrate the gang and is brought to HK to meet the boss. Sporting longer hair than I recall seeing on his head, Yu gives himself ample opportunities in this film to show his martial arts abilities - very little - if any - of it wire enhanced. Things are looking good for him - though he finds himself in the middle of some internal gang strife as the gangster's son (Kong Wa) is being egged on by his Lady MacBeth wife to take over the gang.

At any rate, his cover is soon blown when Sharon intrudes and tries to arrest him and send him back to the Mainland. Circumstances of course force the two of them to work together and after a wild car chase, a bicycle chase, a helicopter shootout, some solid fights and a number of shootouts (Mark Houghton and Chi Cheung-hua being two of the baddies) they close in on their target. All in all it is rather unchallenging but fun for what it is - and both Yu and Sharon give solid performances and manage to take a lot of punishment and keep on ticking. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Red Wolf (Hong Kong, 1995: Yuen Woo-Ping)** - Shares similar storyline to recent another modern flick viewed recently, *City Hunter*, but *Red Wolf* [in my opinion] is far superior movie. It's pirates on a ship again and head of security Kenny Ho is the man in his place to fight them. Should really have watched this long time ago, the HKL disc was gathering dust more than it should have been. Lots of gunplay+some martial arts here and there before [the] excellent finale with plenty of kicking action. Elaine Lui (from Angel 1&2) is stunning as gf of criminals leader and does action scenes well also. Does not win any prizes from storyline but very entertaining. (by Tex Killer)



**Red Zone (Hong Kong, 1995: Edward Tang)** - Ken Lo's character is hired to go undercover by Guand and Kenny Ho to capture Lester Chan, who has weapons (I guess). Another cop vs. the bad guys movie. But, I knew that when I started searching for this thing 5 months ago, and now that I have it I'm very impressed. I was told correctly that the fight scenes, though not abundant, were excellent. And I was very surprised to see gun fights that were entertaining as well. Another thing to note is that everyone does their own thing in this, besides Lester Chan because there were some odd cuts with him. But other than that, Ken Lo, Ken Ho, and Yu all do everything on their own, stunts and fights. I had never heard of Kenny Ho before, and I was surprised at what he could do. Kenneth Lo and Yu perform excellently as I expected too.

Like I said, not too many fights. The first one is short, maybe 10 hits total, with Ho and Yu taking on Ken Lo in a bar. Nothing special.

But shortly afterword, our friend Ken Lo has a brawl in his house. This fight is so excellently choreographed that the first time I watched it it seemed to take a few minutes, while in reality it had a total of a little more than a minute of actual fighting. Kenneth takes on three guys in his house using strategy to make sure they all get knocked out. What makes this scene so good is both the choreographer's techniques and Kenneth's ability to totally outshine anyone who steps in front of him. He fakes being hurt, knocks 2 guys away, throws one's head into the ceiling fan and dropping him to the ground, takes the other two at the same time, knocks one away while he knees the other in the chest, which lays him out, and finally gets smacked around a few times before he can get a good hit off the last one, whom he knees in the face, sending him back over a glass table. If I were to show this clip to you, you wouldn't be very obliged to get this movie, mainly because it's the longest and best fight, so you'll have to buy this one to see the talent involved. Oh and Ken Lo can still kickbox with the best of them.

Yu has a little exchange with someone on a hillside which, though only about 16 seconds long, is excellent to the degree of the one with Kenneth. He fights an escaped witness (I think), and Yu falls and hits his head on a hard surface on the hillside. Was it intentional? It looked real. Awesome choreography again, and I wonder if the person who made it was thinking "Hmm, what can I do to make this fight short, but still make people totally satisfied?" Reminds me of the fights in In the Line of Duty 5.

The next part seemed as though it was the last scene, but it wasn't. Kenny Ho and Yu infiltrate some hideout and go their own ways. While Yu takes on 4 guys in a small room, Kenny Ho is chasing after a jeep while riding a bike! Before that, though, he and the guy he was chasing jumped from some 10 feet up onto the top of a car. This bike scene is something I haven't seen since Project A. I imagine that had this been a Hollywood movie, the bike would be replaced with either a motorcycle or a motorized SOMETHING. Ho seems to ride it himself the entire time, and at one point he's in front of the jeep and almost takes a spill! Yu's fight is impressive, with him doing everything on his own, plus a heel kick, followed by a jumping roundhouse, followed by another heel kick! Most of this is him defending against shovels and picks, but I still like it. Doesn't seem the least bit contrived.

In the last scene, Ho and Yu rescue Lo in a gunfight. I figured, "Well, I don't like gunfights much, but since the rest of the action in this movie was so good, this must be good too." Right I was. Yu and Ho don't spend the whole time shooting, but jump through racks, slide along something hanging from the ceiling, and then Ho, out of no where, does a double jump kick on a guy that looks like something Jackie has to have a double do for him these days. Oh and it was him, this movie doesn't use cheap cuts to confuse the viewer into thinking that the actual guy did it when a stunt double did. It's all real. Lester Chan, though, is faked a few times. He gets beaten up by Ken Lo at the end and Lo looks good doing it, though it's maybe 20 seconds long.

I don't know if everyone read my review scheme, but even if this movie had had only that one fight with Ken Lo in the beginning, I would still love it (but I'd be angry if they didn't use Yu for anything). It shows that the choreographer knew what he was doing and then sat back saying, "There, it's small, but no one else can do as good a job." Well I appreciate it, and I'm so happy to own this movie.

I'll add that the acting was all top notch. Ken Lo's character was done perfectly I think, with him doing a sort of "I can kick your ass, but let's be friends" attitude. Yu, well, I don't know, but whatever character he plays I'm always happy it seems. Probably because he's usually a lead player. Ken Lo's roles are usually small, and whenever he can show this much talent, I jump for joy. Another thing is that all the action has very fitting music, and the sound effects are as believable as the best films out there. (by Eric Jacobus of the Stunt People)

**Requital (Hong Kong, 1992: Kevin Chu Yen-Ping)** - I've tracked down movies on their squib quality alone, and I've got to honestly say that Requital takes the cake.

But besides quarts of blood flying as every bullet successfully lands, there's a lot of other things going on in *Requital* as well. Too many things in my opinion. There's an excessive amount of characters, many that don't contribute much of anything but certainly win in confusing the viewer. The film could of lost a lot of these fodder types and tightened the entire affair up a bit. I think quite a few characters, especially Tung (I forget his real name) are just a little bit bland. Where are the little touches like Tony Leung Chiu Wai making paper cranes in *Hard Boiled*, or the snoopies in *Fulltime Killers*? Little things like that make or break movies, and quite a few characters in *Requital* aren't much more than cookie cutter seen it a thousand times before types.

The movie does have a lot going for it though. It's brutal, for starters. The shoot outs and fight scenes are sure to make you wince, as every time a bullet or punch connects, it usually sounds like someone's getting smashed with a hammer. Pretty visceral. And those squibs... My god... Hehehhee.

Very solid music throughout, and some beautiful scenery shots. It doesn't have dozens of great things going for it, but it also has very few things wrong with it. It rises above mediocrity for sure, but doesn't creep into classic territory either.

A very solid 7.5 out of 10. I did view this one on VCD, to note, so the quality was VHS'ish, maybe even a bit below it. But, VCD works for me, as this film is extremely rare, and that's the only way I found to view it, period. And, like I and the other reviewer said, the movie's confusing. Maybe further viewings would push the rating up a bit. I definitely can see that. (by Bogey Man of IMDB)

**Return Engagement (Hong Kong, 1990: Joe Cheung)** - Ah, how nice it is to be back in the welcoming arms of Hong Kong guns and blood actioners in which machine guns never run out of bullets, gunshot wounds are treated like pesky mosquito bites and mercy is a human quality that has long been forsaken. Back in the late 1980's Hong Kong began making a shift from martial arts action films to something that was much more real to Hong Kong audiences; cops and criminal operatic bloodbaths that played out on the mean streets of the city. This genre reached its apogee with John Woo and Chow Yun Fat taking it to high melodramatic art with *The Killer*, *Hard Boiled* and *The Better Tomorrow* films. But there were plenty of others that fed off the cinematic bloodlust that these films created and though far from high art, they can be good fun as you watch incredulously as armies of men are mowed down unceremoniously like standing duck pins.

Director Joe Cheung had already gone down this path with *Flaming Brothers* in 1987 which starred Chow Yun Fat and Alan Tang and he was to make another terrific one after *Return Engagement* called *Pom Pom* and *Hot Hot* in 1992. It has perhaps one of the worst English titles ever for a bullet ballet film but it is filled with some of the most imaginative gunplay in any film. The action was choreographed by Stephen Tung Wai as he does in this film. The shootouts in this one are not as clever or as fancy as those in *Pom Pom* but there sure are a lot of them. I think within the first 10 minutes of the movie the filmmakers indulge us in three different bloody encounters. There is then admittedly a lengthy pause in the bloodletting but they are just saving their budget for a climax that litters the highway with a body count that could have filled the Super Bowl. Say what you want about Hong Kong but they come prepared to a funeral for anything.

It begins in Canada where Brother Lung (Alan Tang) is seeking revenge for his brother who has been killed and hung publicly from a tree by the Mafia who seem intent on making Chinese restaurants switch their fare from dim sum to pizza. They must really hate fortune cookies. Lung's wife played by Carrie Ng, apparently on a coffee break from another film, wants to go to Hong Kong with their baby girl, Gaga, to keep her out of danger. Lung does a Lone Wolf and Cub selection process and Gaga picks the bullets and has to stay while Ng gets ready to leave. She doesn't make it as the Mafia gun her down. Lung gets his revenge and has to go to jail while Gaga goes to Hong Kong with one of his men. But over the years he loses track of her and after being released he goes to HK to search for her.

This brings him into contact with a small hostess bar owner (Elizabeth Lee) and a friend of his daughter's Little Lung (May Lo). As he searches for his daughter, he becomes close to both women but in this world getting close to anyone is a sure recipe for disappointment and tragedy. Young thug on the make Pang (Simon Yam in his grinning vicious acting days) takes a dislike to all three of them and this leads to a whole lot of mayhem and dying. Andy Lau shows up for a small but active role as a gunman from Canada who comes over to help Lung take care of what needs taking care of. Also popping in are David Wu as a Karaoke heartthrob, Dennis Chan as a hotel manager, Ku Feng as an old time Triad boss and Melvin Wong as a cop who has a few lines and then must have been off to another film. One clearly senses that a few of these actors were in and out in a day or two. Those were the days when they were all doing multiple films at the same time. Nothing really special here but some solid action with a good melodramatic core makes it an easy enjoyable watch. And Elizabeth Lee is lovely though there isn't enough of her but she must have considered this good training for her role a few years later in *Love to Kill*. (by Brian of View

from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Return of the Lucky Stars (Hong Kong, 1989: Stanley Fung)** - It's another one. The Lucky Stars are back again, but it doesn't mean that the movie lives up to its name.

The movie starts out with the gang performing a Chinese lion dance (really funny stuff) for the grand opening of their store. Then there's an incident in the store where Eric Tsang and Miu Kiu Wai get dressed in drag (also funny stuff-Eric speaks some English in here. He also sings "Like a virgin").

So with a very good comedic beginning you think that the movie is going well, right? Wrong. The movie just keeps going and going. It shows how Inspector Tso managed to trick them into helping a felon get out of jail and back on his feet in the crime business...

Of course, you have your "let's play some tricks on the girl while trying to feel her up" moments, but they're not that good either. If you get any kind of laughs from them, it's because of Eric Tsang. He's the goofy looking Asian that can make a bad scene seem decent.

Lau Kar Wing choreographed the action in the movie? YES. There was action in this movie? YES. With such a great choreographer (at points now and then in his career life) you'd think that any action in here is going to be great. Well, that is the case, BUT it's too damn slow. They should've undercranked it a little. You got these somewhat normal fights, but they're just too slow.

I give thumbs up to the end of the movie. You got some good action and humor mixed in one. My favorite was with Eric Tsang. Eric, while holding a machine gun, is chased by a gangster. He turns around and starts firing at him. When he runs out of bullets, he starts shouting out noises as if his gun was still firing. Then the guy chases him again. There's this weird looking playground type thing-it's like a tubular thing with lots of holes. So the guy tried to find Eric but every time he looks into a hole, Eric pops out from another one and just hits him in the groin or anywhere else. Eric gets out of the damn thing and runs again. He sees a bunch of baseballs lying on the ground and begins to throw them at the gangster. He gets a baseball bat and starts chasing him. Now the gangster jumps into the playground thing, but every time he pops his head out, Eric just whacks him with the bat.

There are some more good moments and a few neat stunts (like when a guy opens the door, Eric hits him with the damn bat, and you see the guy flying across the room)

I guess it's so-so. I recommend renting it or borrowing it from a friend. But since I'm trying to get every damn HK movie out there, I bought it. I think if Sammo had something to do with the movie, it would have been a lot better. (by Kncklz2000 of HKMDB)

**Return to a Better Tomorrow (Hong Kong, 1994: Wong Jing)** - Despite the title, this is not a sequel to the influential John Woo/Tsui Hark *A Better Tomorrow* series. This is director Wong Jing's belated attempt at cashing in on said series. Long after the heroic bloodshed film had seen its heyday along comes Wong trying to revive it with some fresh young talent, namely Ekin Cheng and Lau Ching Wan along with the ever-present (at least in Wong Jing films) Chingmy Yau.

This movie can be seen as slightly important from an historical viewpoint, it certainly succeeded in helping nail the coffin shut on the heroic bloodshed cycle, and it also inadvertently went miles toward helping usher in the Young & Dangerous films that would follow. Wong Jing would later produce a few of the Young & Dangerous pictures including the first in the series (not to mention directing/producing a few subsequent knock-offs), while Ekin Cheng would make an even bigger name for himself as the star of that series.

*Return to a Better Tomorrow* is a fairly typical story of Triad highs and lows. Ekin Cheng plays an up and coming Triad leader and Lau Ching Wan is a bumbling new recruit who idolizes his boss. The film opens with a daring attack on a rival gang leader staged with borrowed Ringo Lam style in a movie house drenched with bluish light and rock video cinematography (certainly one of the film's more exciting sequences). As the target attempts a narrow escape it's Lau that bravely stops him, using the always-dangerous fake gun trick. Although Lau is successful in wounding the enemy it's ultimately Ekin who saves the day, but Lau's bravery doesn't go unnoticed and he's rewarded with both his bosses' respect and friendship.

Plot twists arise with the introduction of Cheng's boss (Ben Lam), a drunken and seemingly harmless guy making a name for himself in the underworld by hiding in the shadow of his more successful underling. If he's not wooing girls he's delivering embarrassingly bad karaoke renditions of canto-pop tunes. But, Cheng being the Triad leader

with a heart of gold treats his big brother with the respect he's due (even if the audience can't figure out why he's due even that).

After a couple of plot twists and turns (in typical Wong Jing style the film is padded out to reach a suitable feature length), we discover that both the OCTB and Interpol are quickly building a case against Cheng and his apparent drug trafficking business, something a good-guy Triad like Cheng would never do, in other words someone is framing our golden boy gangster. But, before we can figure out who the dirty culprit of said frame-job is the law catches our boy red-handed with the incriminating goods planted in his headquarters.

Cheng is placed under arrest and just as things look really grim in swoops a bleach-blond psycho named Holland Boy (Ngai Sing). Holland Boy lays waste to a bunch of police and frees Cheng, who's not too happy with Holland Boy's lethal tactics. We find out that the bleach-bond mystery man was sent by Cheng's less than reliable boss to help him escape and get him over the border to the mainland where he can hide out till things blow over.

Time to cut ahead, Cheng joins Holland Boy on a less than spectacular vacation in the mainland, just to discover that the dope-dealer is really his boss and it's elimination time. Okay, so the bottle-blond psycho was sent to kill, quick solution jam a beer bottle in a very painful way down his psychotic throat and make a break for it. I do have one question here; Cheng told Lau to make sure the target is dead, so why not follow his own advice? That said, obviously the bleach-blond psycho still lives. We cut back to Hong Kong, where Holland Boy is back in time to help his leader torture Cheng's girlfriend played by Wong Jing regular Chingmy Yau.

After a couple years pass we find out that Lau is now in charge and is enjoying much of the same success that Cheng once had. Michael Wong plays one of Lau's boys, whose father (Paul Chun Pui) owns a restaurant that recently hired an illegal immigrant from the mainland (Cheng). The restaurant plays host to some excitement one day as some rival Triad boys attempt to cause some trouble for Wong and his father, time for Cheng to kick into his hero mode and save the day. The low-level Triad rivals are obviously insulted and later kidnap Wong to get their revenge.

Wong's father is very upset and needs Lau's help to get his son back. Cheng and Wong's dad pay a visit to Lau. As soon as Lau sees Cheng a cheerful reunion ensues. Having established that Lau was not involved in Cheng's downfall, the two pledge their devotion to one another and decide to seek revenge on their drug dealing boss.

*Return To A Better Tomorrow* suffers from several problems, not the least of which is a very derivative script. Wong Jing is obviously trying to join the ranks of John Woo and Ringo Lam with this gangland opus. But, his lack of originality proves how special the filmmakers he's imitating really are.

In a film like this, casting is as important as direction, and this is one misguided cast. Lau has proven to be a versatile and enjoyable actor in other films, but here he's wooden and lifeless (a real shame). Michael Wong is always wooden and having seen him in a number of English speaking roles I no longer believe it's the language barrier, the boy simply isn't a very good actor. Cheng is always used as eye-candy for the ladies and sometimes he delivers a nugget of presence here, but his character is more a series of clichés than a real person. Appearing also are James Wong as Ekin's lawyer and Parkman Wong as the fair-minded cop. (by Jay Wassmer of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Rich and Famous (Hong Kong, 1987: Taylor Wong)** - "Gong woo ching" (Rich and Famous, 1987, directed by Taylor Wong Tai-Loi) ostensibly stars Chow Yun-Fat as a very suave Hong Kong triad (gang) leader. The real star, however, was a then-rising star who would go on to play some suave triad leaders himself, Andy Lau. Lau is onscreen more than Chow and is clearly the protagonist, Lam Tin- Kwok.

Around the time the PRC/Hong Kong border was closed in 1953 (after two million Chinese fled to Hong Kong in the preceding four years), Kwok's father died en route, and Kwok was raised with Tang Kat-Yung. Yung (Alex Man) is a f\_\_k-up with, among other vices, a gambling addiction. Kwok (Andy Lau) regularly has to come to his aid, sacrificing himself to save his "older brother." And also his adoptive sister when she is captured by the bald, sadistic rival triad leader Lo-Tai (Chun Hiang-Ko)

Chai successfully demands Kwok's release. Kwok and Yung and their stuttering, sneezing cousin Hung (Alan Tam) eventually join Chai's gang. Chai is impressed by Kwok, knows that Yun cannot be relied on (not even to know when to keep quiet) and that Hung is not cut out to be a gangster.

Yun more or less pimps the girl with whom he is enamored (but who holds him at more than arm' length) to Chai, who marries her. Yun leads some Filipino hired killers to the wedding to kill Chai. This is followed by a chase, a car crash, and an extended confrontation in which Lau proves himself brave and loyal.

At the end, Kwok goes off to Malaysia to “go straight,” pledging to return if Chai ever needs him. Kwok and his adopted father twice persuade Chai not to kill Yun, who is so thoroughly malevolent that it will strike most viewers (as it did me) that he should be put down like a rabid dog. After his prison term (6 years), he will surely return to stir up more trouble (in the sequel *Tragic Hero*).

Perhaps the good son protecting the bad son (and his own chances at happiness) and the frequently slipping peace among the triads was less formulaic in 1987 than it seems now, along with the attempt to go straight (Once a triad, always a triad) that comes even more into play in “Tragic Hero.” It’s hard to block out all the Hong Kong triad movies made since 1987 that I’ve seen, but I think “Gong woo ching” was probably an attempt to repeat the success of John Woo’s “Ying hung boon sik” (*A Better Tomorrow*, starring Chow Yun-Fat and Leslie Cheung) from the year before.

In Hong Kong action movies directed by John Woo and Johnnie To, I am often amazed at how many shots are fired (often at fairly close range) without hitting their target. In the two Taylor Wong movies, I’m amazed that characters survive absorbing many bullets. Oddly, the impact does not even seem to knock the actors backward. There is plenty of blood (especially in the sequel) and I am more interested in the characters.

What makes “Gong woo ching” worth watching IMO is the acting of Andy Lau and Alan Tam (both big Hong Kong pop singers as well as fine actors). Lau either had not developed his sinister grin yet or did not deploy it. (Come to think of it, I don’t recall him smiling at all in “Gong woo ching.”) His Kwok is a paragon of loyalty and self-sacrifice, pure of heart (virginal as well as trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, etc. as the parts Jet Li would later play). Tam’s Hung is also loyal if less obviously competent than Kwok. He is the character who grows over the course of the movie as well as the main source of comic relief. OK, there’s some of the sentimentality of 1930s Hollywood gangster movies in which a rejected aspirant to heroism comes through when the chips are down.

Chow Yun-Fat has an almost fixed smile and does not seem to be involved in criminal enterprises. Chai is way too good to be true, even as a successful legitimate businessman, let alone a triad boss, though Chow has the charisma and the expensive suits hang well on him.

The DVD I got from Netflix has dialogue in Cantonese or Mandarin or Spanish(!) and the usual occasionally ungrammatical English subtitles. It includes extensive, rolling talent files for the four lead actors (through 2000) and trailers for some other movies, including a dubbed-into-English (atrociously) one for “Tragic Hero,” the sequel. It does not include a trailer for “Gong woo ching”, however.

There is nothing special about the cinematography, so there's not much to be lost in transfer. The print from which the transfer was made was not in great shape. I think that the dialogue would be difficult to understand even if I understood the language(s), so it's good that there are subtitles. Not that the dialogue is all that important. The actors show rather than tell their characters. (by Stephen O. Murray of [Epinions.com](http://Epinions.com))

**Righting Wrongs (Hong Kong, 1986: Corey Yuen) – aka *Above the Law*** - Prosecutor Hsia (Yuen Biao from *Eastern Condors*) has a problem. He is prosecuting a known drug runner named Chow, but despite the fact that the police have eight drawers of information on Chow, Hsia's entire case is based on one witness. That witness was brutally murdered the night before along with his entire family. Frustrated with a legal system that protects "scum," and encouraged by a trial judge(!), Hsia sets out on a career as a part-time vigilante.

Hsia starts by killing Chow's assistant Wei Cheng. To do this, Hsia drops off an office building's roof attached to a line, bursts through the window of Wei's office, and beats Wei to death with his bare hands (and sneakered feet). Then Hsia, in a spectacular stunt scene, drops face first to street level, arriving smoothly and safely at the bottom. Eat that, Tom Cruise!

The local head of police, Sergeant Wong, assigns Caucasian cop Cindy to investigate Wei's murder. Cindy is played by American martial arts star Cynthia Rothrock. Rothrock is probably best known in the states for the *Lady Dragon* and *Rage and Honor* films, none of which give you any idea of how good she can be in an action scene. She is the highlight of *Righting Wrongs*, though for some reason she's wearing enough make-up to be all five members of Duran Duran.

Cindy figures out that Hsia is the culprit pretty quickly, but can't prove anything. She visits him at his apartment (Which is huge! Are prosecutors in Hong Kong paid like professional baseball players?), and the two debate the validity of vigilante action in a lawful society. Cindy, being a by-the-book type, refuses to acknowledge that you should ever take the law into your own hands.

Hsia next makes an attempt on the life of Chow. He breaks into Chow's house, only to find Chow already dead. Chow was killed by his superior, the mysterious "Crown," who is actually Sergeant Wong! As Hsia is examining the body, Cindy shows up and tries to arrest him at gun point. Hsia manages to disarm her, the two scramble for the gun, and Cindy retrieves it.

Just kidding. This being a martial arts film, as soon as the gun flies out of Cindy's hand it disappears into the Discarded Gun Dimension, so Cindy and Hsia have a rollicking martial arts fight through Chow's opulently appointed house instead. Hsia manages to handcuff Cindy to a rail and make a get away.

One would think that the game would be up for Hsia, especially when Cindy shows up at one of Hsia's court dates, intent on arresting him. Perhaps not surprisingly, the aforementioned trial judge provides Hsia with a bogus alibi, and Cindy leaves empty handed. The rest of the movie concerns itself with Wong's attempts to cover up his crimes, and the final comeuppance he gets once Hsia and Cindy find out his true colors.

One thing should be made clear about this movie is that it is not any kind of serious movie about the pros and cons of vigilantism. Hsia's turn towards do-it-yourself justice is merely an excuse to get a whole bunch of kung fu fights into the movie. As acted by Yuen Biao, Hsia seems ridiculously glib about the whole situation, especially when we find out that he knew the family whom we see killed at the beginning of the film. Meanwhile, Cindy's opposition to vigilantism is merely an excuse for her to get into a fight with Hsia. The parts of the movie that don't deal directly with people beating the stuffing out of each other are often silly and incompetent. Worst of all, to fill the movie out to feature length, a large amount of *Righting Wrongs*' running time is filled by the alleged comic relief of Cindy's hapless partner, Bad Egg.

Take this example: Bad Egg is sitting in Cindy's parked car when a meter maid comes by to ticket it. Egg shows her his CID identification, saying he is a "friend." She says that she hates police. He says he will just drive the car away. She says she can write a ticket in eleven seconds. Bad Egg puts on his seat belt, adjusts the mirrors and starts the car, but not in time to avoid the ticket. The meter maid then asks him for his license, because the car is now running. Bad Egg only has a temporary one, but he says he's going for his test the next day. The meter maid asks, "You want me to give you a break?" He nods yes. But she counters, "I get my satisfaction from stomping people at the lowest point of their lives," and she tickets him for driving without a license. Cindy arrives back at the car, and berates Bad Egg for getting ticketed so easily. Egg points out that it isn't his fault, and points out to Cindy that two cars across the street are also being ticketed.

Ha ha! It just doesn't get any funnier than that!

No really, it never does! Maybe this kind of stuff has them rolling in the aisles in Hong Kong, but man, it's just a drag to English speaking audiences. After you've watched as many HK films as we have, you expect this kind of stuff and you get pretty good at just tuning it out. But outside of the comic relief, there isn't much of a plot.

*Righting Wrongs* was directed by Corey Yuen, who handles all the action and fighting with great aplomb, even though little things like scripting and acting obviously fell by the wayside. There is a copious amount of martial arts fighting, which is the only reason anyone would really be watching this movie. The movie contains some great fights: the battle between Yuen Biao and Cynthia Rothrock is fantastic piece of choreography, and is only topped by a later fight between Rothrock and Karen Shepherd. The latter is playing one of Crown's assassins, though she's dressed like a member of The Bangles.

There are also some action scenes involving vehicles that are nearly as impressive as those in the higher budget Jackie Chan films. Remember Jackie hanging from a helicopter in *Supercop*? Well, Biao did it four years earlier, only he's hanging from an airplane.

The best way to see this film (as with most movies) is on DVD, but after the Guys @ Stomp Tokyo's separate viewings of the imported *Righting Wrongs* DVD, we discovered a minor obstacle: we somehow managed to see two different movies! Most imported HK DVDs let you choose between the predominant Chinese languages by changing the soundtrack, but *Righting Wrongs* has two cuts of the movie, one on each side of the disc. The sides are marked as "Mandarin" and "Cantonese," which is true -- the dubs are in different languages on each side of the disc, and English subtitling is available on both. But here's the rub: If you watch the Mandarin version, you get a different movie with a different ending from the one on the Canto side! Entire scenes go by the wayside in each telling of the story, and it wasn't until each of us described entire scenes that the other hadn't seen that we realized we hadn't really seen the same movie. Even the fate of Yuen Biao's character changes from side to side, and we recommend that you seek out the DVD so that you watch both. (by Scott Hamilton and Chris Holland of Stomp Tokyo)

**Roar of the Vietnamese, The (Hong Kong, 1991: Jeng Wing-Chiu)** - It can make for a somewhat strange and ironic experience to watch this 1991 film some years after the Handover of Hong Kong (back) to Mainland China. This is due in some part from the grim movie's most sympathetic characters being ones who had fled to the former British Crown Colony from a communist country. This is especially so when we are shown how desperate they were to leave their homeland and what they are willing to do to avoid being sent back there. Something else to be considered is its being so that although the unfortunate individuals in focus are Vietnamese in terms of nationality, they are Cantonese-speaking ethnic Chinese (like Tsui Hark as well as the characters essayed by Tony Leung Ka Fai and Dean Shek in the auteur's "A Better Tomorrow III").

THE ROAR OF VIETNAMESE -- an offering which would have been better entitled "Roar of the Vietnamese" -- starts off with the on-screen display of black and white documentary or news type still pictures of representatives of what have come to be known to the world as "boat people". These are then followed by a Hong Kong TV news reporter's painting a not particularly complimentary portrait of these refugees. All in all, for much of the first half of the film, the audience is provided with less than complimentary views of particular Vietnamese personalities (all of them with the kind of records that caused them to be pre-selected -- by a corrupt cop played by Lai Hon Chi -- to be willing to commit crimes in Hong Kong in return for being sprung out of the refugee center and given hope of their getting to emigrate to the U.S.).

Just as it seems as though they have been established as being downright disgusting, if not irredeemably inhuman(e), by way of their being shown engaging in the kind of acts that are considered anti-social (e.g., open masturbation) as well as outright criminal (e.g., the cold-blooded murder of a child), the makers of THE ROAR OF VIETNAMESE radically change tack. More specifically: The recruits to the "Viet Gang" who carry out "missions" -- that range from setting fire to a recreation center into which people have been locked to directly attacking and killing other folks -- consequently are shown to be truly at the mercy of the afore-mentioned Officer Mak, his lieutenant (Waise Lee plays the Hong Kong-born Vietnamese turncoat named Tian San) and a woman we first see being questioned by the police as to the whole affair (Sibelle Hu's Wai Yuen is yet another Vietnamese refugee) as well as people who do care for the welfare of their fellows, even if not their unfortunate victims.

To a surprising extent (in large part, I suspect, due to the strength of the cast rather than the script), the main group focused upon in THE ROAR OF VIETNAMESE do get individualized, and humanized. Those who really stand out are: A mother (portrayed by Kara Hui Ying Hung, an actress who really deserves to be in higher budget and quality productions than this one) and the silent daughter she obviously loves very much; a quiet ex-cop (played by Kwan Lai Kit); and someone wrongly arrested by his now "team-member" and still chaffing at having spent three years in jail as a result as well as his current circumstance (Lau Ching Wan shines here and is the heart of this film). The others in the gang are: A young woman and the man who took a bullet in the neck that was meant for her and subsequently has become mute (played by Chan Pui-San and Cheung Kwok-Leung); a dissident intellectual type who spends his free time writing never mailed wishful letters to his mother; a fellow who spends much of his time in between "missions" sleeping to dream; and a virgin man-boy consigned to be the most caricaturish character of this lot.

If only there hadn't been a compulsion to supplement the movie's dramatic portions with a slew of action sequences that actually don't look all that greatly realistic. My feeling too is that the addition of triad intrigue dilutes the emotional political message and components of THE ROAR OF VIETNAMESE. This is a great pity because what could have been a really interesting serious film ended up feeling cheapened as well as made mundane by those of its sections that could have existed in just about any low budget Hong Kong movie (as opposed to one with the unusual group of characters and starting point that this film had). (by YTSL of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Rock N' Roll Cop (Hong Kong, 1994: Kirk Wong)** - Most of the time, this film feels like it's in constant motion -- a set of moving pieces. Either the actors are on the move or the camera is veering about -- rarely at stop. It makes for a hyperactive and nearly exhausting film experience. Those few moments of rest -- usually involving musical interludes -- take on an almost mystical and calming effect. Director Kirk Wong enjoys pushing the intensity buttons within films and getting the adrenaline going. His films generally revolve around cops and bad guys in fare such as Organized Crime and Triad Bureau, Gunmen and Crime Story. In Crime Story -- he took Jackie Chan into entirely new territory and created one of Jackie's most gritty and emotionally charged films.

In particular, Wong seems to be fascinated by the chase -- following the police in their relentless and often ruthless efforts to track down the criminals. Some of these scenes in Rock N' Roll Cop are brilliantly choreographed and often on a large scale whether it is following a suspect all over the city or frantically pursuing the bad guys in a torrent of gunfire. Often the camera is pulled back to allow the viewer to gain a wide-angle perspective on all the activity that is taking place. To some degree though this is detrimental to the emotional pull of the film as Kirk Wong seems so caught up in the mechanics of the chase that he neglects to flesh out the characters much beyond basic stereotypes. The bad guys are irredeemably evil, the women have questionable morals but essentially good hearts

and the cops are driven by their need to uphold the law. Within the constrictions of these roles though, the actors do a fine job, are quite believable and Carrie Ng in particular is excellent and the emotional core of the film.

The Red Scarf gang – headed by Yu Rong Guang – robs a mahjong parlor in HK and kills a number of the patrons before escaping back to the Mainland. HK policeman, Anthony Wong, is assigned to work with the Mainland cops to capture this gang. The contrast that Kirk Wong paints between the Mainland cop's methods – headed by Wu Xing-Guo (Green Snake, What Price Survival) – as opposed to Anthony's methods is stark and overall very favorable to the Mainland. The Mainland cops are stolid and totally focused while Anthony is casual and undisciplined. The Mainland cops are able to mobilize a veritable army of police and informers to track the gang down and also utilize surveillance cameras everywhere to watch events unfold. Kirk Wong seemingly endorses this nearly "Big Brother" approach, but I found the scene in which the police effortlessly follow Carrie Ng – girlfriend of Yu Rong Guang and ex-girlfriend of Wu – through cameras, eavesdropping and informers as terrifying as the gang was. Kirk though seems fascinated by this. Still, it is the HK cop who has no qualms about trespassing on individual liberties, while the Mainland cops always follow the letter of the law in obtaining warrants and such.

Eventually of course Anthony Wong and Wu Xing-Guo begin to bond in their common desire to dispatch justice – and Wong even sides with the Mainland police in a dispute regarding jurisdiction of a prisoner – leading him to be branded a "traitor" by the HK police. Only when Wong enters into this alliance with the Mainland cops is he shown to be a good cop – while the rest of the HK police force comes off as small minded and incompetent. Was Kirk Wong directing this film with an eye towards 1997? In the end though Wu, possibly speaking for Kirk, states, "for us there are no political boundaries. We are cops and we catch crooks and that's all that matters". One has to wonder though if Kirk's preference would be a tightly controlled and highly supervised society at the expense of personal liberties.

The film has a large dose of melodrama mixed in with the action (of which there is a fair but not overwhelming amount directed by Bruce Law) and some of the melodrama is effective but some of it is ludicrous. Anthony begins to fall for a singer who knew one of the gang and their budding relationship plays out very nicely and gently when Anthony accompanies her on the guitar at her audition for her big break. But other scenes such as when a main character gets wounded and is carried down the escalator, down the street, placed on a cart and then rushed to the hospital is just plain silly. How about calling an ambulance?

Still, this is a film that speeds by, has some intense moments and I found it compelling (if emotionally not very involving) and impossible to stop viewing even though I had promised myself to only watch half of it before going to bed! (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Rock on Fire (Hong KONG, 1994: Lung Sang) - aka Girl on Fire** - Like an out of control pinball on jet propulsion fuel, this film madly veers between kinetic violence and explicit highly charged sex and often the two are indistinguishable from one another in this satisfying "B" action exploitation film. A good "B" action film can be a purifying experience in that it is not burdened down with expectations or the need to develop character beyond the basics. It is all there on the surface for the viewer to slurp up quickly like a melting ice cream cone. This film fits neatly into the basic plot rules of a "B" action film, but it pushes everything over the edge like a bulldozer.

Two Japanese Red Army terrorists are in Hong Kong trying to buy some weapons from Stuart Ong. Ong is a HK city councilor and thus off limits to the cops – but he runs a weapon smuggling scheme on the side and enjoys very rough sex whenever and however he can get it. At one point he chokes a woman to death – and then proceeds to have sex with her. He is clearly a nasty character and he has Billy Chow around to protect him.

The terrorists are a perverse brother and sister act – the tortured brother played by Ken Lo screams out in agony whenever his sister, Mikie Ng Miu-yee, has intercourse with another man. Mikie – called Icy – drips sex like a warm ripe mango – all sultry and sticky – and very dangerous. She is one of the more vicious femme fatales in a long line of HK femme fatales. Her idea of sex is akin to a stock car rally full of moving parts and skid marks – with a big car crash at the end. Having sex with her is tantamount to death – she rips out the throat of one fellow during orgasm with her teeth – while another fellow ends up with his eyeballs bouncing on the floor as if surprised to find itself in a game of craps. In other words, Mikie is magnificent – absolutely stunning and it is a shame that she seems to have appeared in only a handful of Cat. III films in the mid-90s. Ken Lo has some good high kicking scenes – and proves how tough he is as well when he seals his own wound with a blowtorch!

On the other side of the law are the cops – headed up by Shing Fui On – but most of the focus is on Inspector Cindy (Takajo Fujimi) and her male partner. They try working their way towards Stuart Ong and the terrorists, but every angle seems to lead to a dead body or a dead end. The film rarely slows down for more than a moment before it is heating up again – as the film shifts rapidly between the different sets of characters. Eventually, we enter into the



sacred realm of girls and guns – as the oh so composed Inspector Cindy faces off against Mikie in a bone crunching fight. Cindy eyes her opponent carefully, while Mikie purrs and licks her lips in anticipation.

For whatever reason, this film fared quite poorly at the box office in 1994, but it deserves much better. It is a well-made film for its kind – with some good action and a continuous tense edgy core that feels like it can go anywhere – and Mikie may make your eyeballs feel like rolling on the floor as well. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Rosa (Hong Kong, 1986: Joe Cheung)** - Yuen Biao is a cop going after a drug gang. One of those less-popular Yuen Biao movies, those who pass this one up miss one of Biao's (if not his VERY best) modern fights, which is the one at the end against Dick Wei. Other than that, it's a semi-cute story but the only way I really stayed interested was knowing that an incredible end scene awaited. And when I saw it, I was STILL impressed...

First fight comes about 40 minutes into the film and it's very spread out and short, but still good. Minor bursts of kickboxing, Biao doing 95% of it and throwing fine kicks along the way and there's a cameo from Hsu Hsia, the mantis practitioner from *Secret Rivals 2*, he does no fighting, instead his double does a great backfall across the room.

Which brings us to the last scene rather quickly. It starts with a huge group fight against Biao and Wai, which itself starts with some good stuntwork by Biao and then a stunt that involves everyone where a truck rams into a stack of crates, knocking EVERYONE over. Following that is an awesome display of group fighting. Biao does acrobatics, the stuntmen do acrobatics, kicks go flying and the fighting is extremely fast and good. Wai Ying Hung's fighting is no less impressive as she does fabulous kicks and then her double goes through with some nice acrobatics, followed by one stuntman's very painful fall onto a box.

Next comes the whole reason to see Rosa. Biao's fight against Dick Wei is some of the best kickboxing I've ever seen on camera. It's like the Owl vs. Bumbo end fight, only 10 times longer and fast enough to not even need undercranking. Woven into this is Wai's fight against Chung Fa which is short lived but up to quality as Biao's fight against him in the finale of *Twinkle Twinkle Lucky Stars*. Great handwork too, similar in nature and speed. Back to Biao's fight against Wei, they continue it in a hallway with some painful kicks and Wei throws a kick THROUGH a door, and it goes into a meat cutting room. Here's where it goes non-stop, only interrupted by Biao's partner first getting a turning kick to the throat from Dick Wei (something that would kill a horse), and then flying down metal stairs twice in a super-painful fashion. Wei and Biao fight like they did in *Millionaire's Express* except in a larger space, throwing kicks as often as punches, all done to perfection. Every cut is done in a way where I can find little or no improvement to be made, choreography is superb, and wouldn't you know it but Biao choreographed this scene too. After that they go into a meat locker where the fighting stops and some comedy ensues. I'll add that the editing in this scene is done up to par with the best out there.

I was thoroughly impressed and satisfied. Seems like any time Dick Wei squares off against Yuen Biao, miracles arise, just like in *Millionaire's Express*. The two of them move at bone breaking speeds and flow through the moves flawlessly and it's a pity they didn't get more throughout the movie. I'm surprised no review out there really recognizes this end fight and I always tend to see stuff like "This has a little action but it's still good," or "Not much action but has some cute comedy." Blah. That doesn't say enough. Had the movie had maybe ONE more fight then it could be a 5/5 but with such a low amount, I can't give it that. But I always love movies with an explosive finale and tend to give them the same ratings, so I can recommend it highly at a 4/5. (by Eric Jacobus of the Stunt People)

**Rumble in the Bronx (Hong Kong, 1995: Stanley Tong)** - A young man visiting and helping his uncle in New York City finds himself forced to fight a street gang and the mob with his martial art skills. *Rumble in the Bronx*, AKA the Hong Kong movie set in New-York but filmed in Vancouver, Canada where half the actors filmed their scenes in Cantonese and the other half in English (often answering each other in 2 different languages) was the first Jackie Chan movie to be released in the US nationwide (someone can fact-check me on that one?)

The original, half-Cantonese, half-English version doesn't really exist outside of Hong Kong. I had to settle for the dubbed English version, although there are some scenes in Cantonese left. I'd love to find it somewhere.

Speaking of which, the dubbed American version has about 10 minutes missing and it shows. Near the end, there's an editing cut that makes absolutely no sense and kinda ruins the ending. Reading the differences between both versions, I concluded that practically the whole 10 minutes were cut there.

The ending credits reveal that Jackie Chan broke his ankle then continued performing with a cast (he covered it up).

What. The. Hell.

Stunts - 92/100 | Jackie Chan. Enough said.

Narrative - 62/100 | Serviceable, but nothing more. Maybe the HK cut would flow better?

Fight Choreography - 87/100 | If only there were more fights I would up this one, but the 2 fights that are in the film are definitely awesome, inventive, and very well choreographed.

Enjoyment - 73/100 | It was a fun and enjoyable ride but that ultimately makes very little sense. Still, it's never a chore to watch a Jackie Chan movie. I feel weird criticizing this guy who puts his body on the line for our entertainment.

Recommended!

So what about the fights in this movie? Well, I say fights plural, but unfortunately there are only 2. Fortunately though, one of them is pretty good, albeit short, but the other one is an all-timer.

The first fight happens in the supermarket Jackie Chan is in, and he fights a bunch of thugs who want to steal stuff for money. And he wipes the floor with them big time. It's short but sweet, featuring some cool stunts that are refreshingly small scale.

Most of the movie then covers what happens to Jackie Chan once these guys come back for revenge. And they screw him up good! So he has to get revenge too...

Which he does in the second fight, the warehouse fight! Now for the few of you who haven't seen this fight sequence, if you were ever wondering what fighting Jackie Chan in an IKEA would look like, that's pretty much it. If you're looking for the best sequence involving Jackie Chan fighting with all the furniture he can lay his hand on, this is the best one from all the Jackie Chan movies I've seen!

Armchairs, fridges, ovens, bowling table, actual wall boards, an arcade game, a grocery cart... I'm probably forgetting some, this is the kinda stuff he fights with and performs acrobatics over, under, and around of. Lovely to watch. (by Daxtreme of KFF)

**Saint of Gamblers (Hong Kong, 1995: Wong Jing)** - I imagine that the idea of Ng Man-Tat, Eric Kot and Natalis Chan all appearing in the same film together is a painful thought to a lot of people. I know some people that would probably prefer having nails hammered into their hands than go through 90-minutes of this threesome. Hammering is a good analogy for their method of acting – subtlety is not part of their vocabulary – as they hit the audience continuously over the head with their eye popping facial expressions, their physical eye poking comedy and their verbal assaults. It's like being caught in a comedic tornado – pulled and pushed in fifty directions – with no logic and no pattern – just go wherever the tornado takes you. Much of this comedy is childishly bad – but within the chaos there are some lovely moments of absurdity.

And where there is pain, there can also be pleasure. The pleasure comes in the voluptuous and salivating forms of Chingmy Yau and Diana Pang Dan. Both of them look like a big, cold drink of water to a very thirsty man. Chingmy is all softness and curves while Pang Dan camps it up to the max as a cold hearted sexually attired seductress.

This film is part of the gambling series of films produced by Wong Jing (God of Gamblers) – who was greatly responsible for the popularity of this genre. By 1995 this genre was sagging a bit and so for good measure, Jing throws in elements of the Shaolin kid genre that was quite popular at the time and even some scenes reminiscent of the video game segment in City Hunter.

The opening scene shows pictures of previous great gamblers in the series – Chow Yun Fat, Stephen Chow and Andy Lau – but times have changed – and this film (completely comedic in nature) has as its protagonist – Eric Kot. Not exactly sleek or elegant or debonair – in fact Kot is the total opposite – a bit chunky, a total rube and about as debonair as a hot dog with all the fixings - but he is the hero of this film.

It begins with Ng Man-Tat (who is seemingly playing the same character he did in Stephen Chow's All for the Winner) visiting a small town in the Mainland and looking for his next gambling genius to make his living off.

Everyone in this town has some sort of supernatural power it seems. After testing all the villagers to see who can change a King into an Ace (one fellow can do this – but first he has to eat it and then let nature take its way – not very convenient in a game of cards!), he settles on Kot. Kot looks and talks as if he is somewhat retarded – but he can make things bigger (he offers to make Ng's penis as big as a watermelon!) and he can read minds as long as he is touching that person.

So they go back to HK where they soon run into Ray Thai (Ben Lam), his girlfriend Chingmy and her young brother who is a kung-fu demon. In the opening scene, the kid takes on a bunch of adults and beats them senseless with a deck of cards and a few well placed kicks - while Chingmy performs a few nifty moves as well in her "God of Gamblers Returns" mode. Ray Thai is entered into the World Championship of Gambling against some tough opposition – the kind that kills if it has to – and so he decides that Kot would make the perfect diversion or fall guy and gets him into the Championship as well. Kot immediately falls for the chewable Chingmy.

The main opponent in the gambling competition is the Mata Hari like siren from Thailand – Pang Dan – who dresses alluringly and defeats her rivals with hypnosis and vast amounts of distracting cleavage. Though she only has perhaps fifteen minutes of screen time, Pang Dan makes them all count.

Silly only begins to describe this film – funny? – well, I would not go that far – but if you think you can pass the endurance test of Kot and Ng Man-Tat (take an aspirin prior to viewing) – the film does have some interesting and amusing scenes – and a nice extended cameo from Donnie Yen as an Interpol agent that includes a few of his famous high jumping kicks. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Satan Returns (Hong Kong, 1996: Lam Wai-Lun) – aka *Satan's Return*; *Devil 666*; *Shaolin vs. Devil's Omen*** - An occult fanatic calling himself Judas (FN) is kidnapping women and ritually removing their hearts. If a woman were to survive that and live, then he would know that he has found the true daughter of the devil. Policewoman Chan Ching (CY) has been having nightmares (or are they visions?) of Judas as well as her long departed father. She joins the investigation of missing, murdered women, headed by Mo Nam aka the Alchemist (DY) and Ka-Ming (DWCW), boyfriend of her roommate Rose (KYKT). Judas is not deterred and mysteriously appears at times to try to interact with Ching. Such interaction starts to affect Ching so that she begins to doubt who she may truly be, and she soon exhibits some the same capabilities that Judas does, such as influencing or enthralling people. Judas finally gets her, and Nam and Ka-Ming arrive with a couple of police squads to rescue her. However the uniformed cops become Judas' thralls, forcing Nam and Ka-Ming to defend themselves against their brothers-in-blue while trying to defeat the occult fanatic at the same time.

First and foremost, you might want to be aware that **this is not a Donnie Yen starring vehicle**. The character Ching played by Chingmy Yau is the main focus as to whether or not she's the devil's daughter. That premise seems kind of trite, and yet at the same time was intriguing. The action in this is unfortunately sub-par, mainly because there are few times that Yen gets to showcase himself. Still, there's a sweet flying double kick and then some of Yen's flashy footwork. When he's initially introduced as the Alchemist and considering the premise of the film, I thought Yen's character would be a police detective in the know about occult cases. Nope, it's just a cool nickname. Dayo Wong looks like a poor man's Louis Fan without the MA chops and meant more for comic relief.

Not gonna lie. I was thinking this was the Yen movie that had Ken Lo in it, but that's *The Holy Virgin Vs The Evil Dead*, so I was sort of disappointed until I resolved myself to the fact that I wasn't watching the movie I thought I was. Still...I don't know. I think I kind of liked it, but I'm not sure. I'll say this though, I kind of wish Donnie would do a remake of this. The premise is good, the script just needs some tweaking to make it a darker film. With today's special f/x being what they are, they could really do some freaky scary stuff, and it would be sweet to see a lot more of Yen's grounded choreography as he takes on an army of Satanic thralls before a final showdown with the villain. (Of course, they would probably turn that last into a giant supernatural wire fu, which would suck.) I'd put this down as one for Donnie Yen completionists. (by Scott Blasingame)

**Satin Steel (Hong Kong, 1994: Tony Leung Siu-Hung)** - This fast, furious, largely daft movie was Jade's immediate follow up to the two *Black Cat* films. If they were based on *Nikita*, the inspiration here is clearly *Lethal Weapon*, with Leung as a headstrong cop (also named Jade Leung!) who believes in shooting first and asking questions...oh, somewhere between eventually and never. With her sensible partner (Lee), she chases evil weapons broker Mr. Fowler and his gang from Singapore to Indonesia. It eventually ends above a volcano, with Jade clinging desperately to a helicopter.

The elements here are hugely variable: Leung and Lee have great chemistry, but Lee's boyfriend Paul (Chan) may be the most irritating bastard in cinema history – his every appearance provoked a strong desire to throw things at the

TV, and we cheered loudly when he was gunned down, particularly since it shut him up for a bit. In contrast Russell Wong is more sympathetic as Fowler's naive lawyer, though since we know what happened to Jade's first husband, this relationship might as well be wearing a sweatshirt marked 'Doomed'. One also wonders why an international arms dealer would employ a troupe of native dancers as henchmen.

While the plot and characterisation leaves a little to be desired in originality and execution, the action is plentiful and energetic. Of particular note is the previously-mentioned helicopter sequence – at first, we suspected heavy stunt doubling, but later on, there are a couple of shots which give pause for thought, and Jade deserves greater credit. It's just a shame it ends so abruptly. Jade's battle against the dancers is also pretty cool, and Lee has a good fight at a train station, culminating with a leap in front of an oncoming engine that merited an immediate rewind and rewatch.

There is, however, something obviously cheap and apparently rushed about the whole endeavour, and it feels like one of the later entries in Cynthia Khan's filmography – particularly, *Angel on Fire*, which also had two policewomen from different lands, travelling to a third (and presumably, cheaper to film in!) country to find the villains. One suspects Jade was under pressure to make another movie while her star was still rising, regardless of the end product's quality. (by Girls With Guns.Org)

**Secret Police (Hong Kong, 1992: Yiu Tin-Hung)** - I was a bit apprehensive before my first viewing of *Secret Police*. With Moon Lee and Alex Fong the stars of this film what could go wrong? Well, anyone that has seen the classic *Angel* trilogy (especially 2 & 3) will understand my trepidation towards watching it. As much as I liked the *Angel* films I can't forget the sequels left Moon mysteriously absent in the finales. Instead, Alex Fong got the spotlight. Now I have nothing against Alex Fong and I thought he did a good job in those films but being the Moon devotee that I am I felt the filmmakers used very bad judgement by not using her more than they did. So this is why I had a bad feeling about *Secret Police*.

Now I can honestly say I was right...in part. About 5 minutes into this film it became apparent to me that this was more or less Alex Fong's show but Moon does have some bright moments. And she has a couple of cool fight scenes like the one near the beginning where she takes out two thieves with a broom or the finale where she's actually present to take out a small army of gangsters.

In *Secret Police*, Alex Fong pretty much hangs around gangsters, stresses out his girlfriend with his reluctance to commit and embarrasses his father (who's a cop) when he gets into trouble. Moon Lee plays his sister who's also a cop that is transferred to the station her father works at. Moon and Alex don't get along so well. In fact, Moon can't stand her brother or his lifestyle.

Tragedy strikes when their father (Ku Feng) is murdered in cold blood by a hired hitman (Billy Chow). When Moon visits her dying father in the hospital good old Alex shows up a moment too late and she rips him a new rear. It really is a moving scene. Moon shows incredible talent as she goes from the deepest despair from the loss of her father to the unbridled rage towards her brother.

Moon vows to avenge her father's death. There's much more to this film but I won't spoil it. There's a reason this thing is called *Secret Police*. Appearing in this film also are Jimmy Lee/Lung Fong as the main bad guy, Shum Wai as the father's police partner and Yip San as Alex's girlfriend.

Unless I really hate a film, I don't like wasting time focusing on the negative aspects of a it (that should be saved for the discussion boards) so I won't go into some of it's flaws. I will say the general HK cinema fan might not get much out of this but if you are a Moon fan you'll certainly appreciate her performance. She looks great in her fight scenes and basically outclasses everyone in the acting department. Now some of you are probably rolling your eyes and thinking 'there he goes again...' but you must remember something: This review was written for Moon fans by a Moon fan. (by Jack Sobjack of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Seventh Curse (Hong Kong, 1987: Lam Nai-choi)** - I entered the realm of HK film fandom honestly enough; I watched one hell of a lot of the old school Kung Fu films while in high school and college, and gravitated toward a few actors and directors I really liked - but finding these on video was a formidable task. It wasn't until I moved to The Big City that I had a fighting chance at locating some of the martial arts flicks of my wasted youth. Like anything

else, 98% of the stuff available on video was absolute crap (as according to Sturgeon's Law, remember), and eventually I drifted on to other pursuits.

Then, a couple of things happened. First, I saw a review for John Woo's *The Killer* in *Time* magazine (*The Killer* was making the rounds of film festivals at the time), and it was glowing enough that I filed the title away for future reference. It would be a couple of years afterwards that I would find a copy of it at a convention (before it was generally available on domestic video). About this time, A&E was showing the British production *The Incredibly Strange Film Show*, which devoted some time to HK films, relying heavily on clips from *Chinese Ghost Story* and *Zu - Warriors from Magic Mountain*. And brothers and sisters, I was hooked all over again.

Now, I didn't do the logical thing at first, i.e., take advantage of Houston's large Asian community (though when I was told about a shop that rented imported laser discs, I began salivating heavily). No, I began to comb the ads you find at the back of film magazines. I hit on one, and ordered a single tape, just to test out the service. Knowing next to nothing about the modern crop of movies, I chose one that *sounded* good. That movie was *Seventh Curse*, and I have never regretted that purchase.

*Seventh Curse* opens at a cocktail party, as an author makes chitchat with several beautiful women from the "Miss Asia" competition. He is, of course, asked where he gets his ideas - this happens to all writers - and he replies quite honestly: he listens to his friends, and an evening of good conversation will usually provide him with plenty of material. Of course, it also helps that he has...well, *interesting* friends, and he introduces two of them - Dr. Yuen (Chin Siu Ho) and Wisely (Chow Yun Fat!).

By way of digression, it should be noted that these two were characters in several successful series of pulpy novels by Ai Hong. Their popularity is best pointed up by the movie's original title, *Yuan zhen xia yu Wei Si Li*, or *Dr. Yuen and Wisely*. The character of Wisely showed up in another movie that year, *The Legend of Wisely*, and again in 1991 in *Bury Me High*, which is, as far as I know, the only movie ever made about geomancy. The author introducing them, incidentally, is Ai Hong himself - it's nice to see the original author acknowledged in this way.

We find out immediately how interesting Dr. Yuen's life is, as he is called upon by the local SWAT team to walk into a hostage situation and treat a hostage who has had a heart attack (Yuen gets the call because his bravery is legendary). The plan is that a policewoman will accompany Yuen disguised as a nurse - at midnight, when the SWAT guys attack, she is to set off a flashbang and help take out the terrorists. Unfortunately for this plan, an impetuous young reporter named Tsai-hung (Maggie Cheung!) is so desperate to get a story, she knocks out the policewoman and takes her place.

This is bad news in more ways than one, as not only does Tsai-hung not know the first thing about being a nurse, she's also foolish enough to let the terrorists see the policewoman's gun in the medical kit. The terrorists know something is wrong, and it is up to Yuen and his fighting skills to put some bad guys in their place and activate the flash grenade. After the terrorists are all either shot or beaten to pieces, and Yuen thinks this particular adventure is over, Tsai-hung still continues to pursue the doctor for a story, even seeking him out at a cocktail party.

Losing the girl by jacking up her rear tires at a traffic light, Yuen arrives home to find his girlfriend (Joyce Godenzi - the future Mrs. Sammo Hung) waiting for him. Unfortunately, also in his lavish pad is a tough-looking Thai Guy named Heh Lung (Dick Wei). Not taking too kindly to Heh Lung interrupting his fun time, Yuen goes on the attack (Yes! Big fight scene!), but is outmatched by the burly Thai. This fight scene illustrates an important axiom of the Hong Kong fight scene: If there is glass present, it must be broken, preferably by having a body thrown through it in the most dangerous-looking way possible. And Yuen has a *lot* of glass in his apartment.

Once he has Yuen on the floor, Heh Lung tells him he must come back to Thailand "to help yourself and Bachu" - it has been a year, and his blood curse will relapse, and Bachu is under a ghost curse. Yuen voices the audience's thoughts, and asks the Thai what the hell he is talking about. But Heh Lung hands Yuen an ornate earring the doctor obviously recognizes, and a piece of paper bearing an address in Thailand - he will wait for Yuen for three days. Spying Joyce cowering in a doorway, Heh Lung warns Yuen to stay away from sex, or his relapse may occur sooner.

Yuen ignores this last warning and gets down to business with Joyce, but soon must break his embrace and clutch his leg in pain as one of the veins in his legs swells and bursts, gushing blood...

Thus Yuen finds himself at the home of his friend Wisely, who Knows About Such Things. Yuen begins the tale of a year before, when he was working with a medical team in deepest darkest Thailand (the Transylvania of HK films), searching for medicinal herbs and a possible treatment for AIDS. It is there that he chances upon the lovely

Bachu\* bathing in a lake. After some cute pleasantries (I guess Yuen speaks her language) drums are heard, and Bachu, suddenly worried, heads for her village.

At camp, The Professor in charge of the expedition tells Yuen that the girl is obviously from the nearby Worm Tribe, and he had best forget about her. And judging from the constant drums, there is some sort of black sacrificial ritual going on tonight; The Professor makes everyone at the campfire promise not to go see it.

So of course Yuen and some of his pals sneak to the Worm Tribe village to check it out.

Once there, they find the resident witch doctor, Aquala (Yasuaki Kurata - again, *maybe*) is lording it over everybody and putting the moves on Bachu. When she rebuffs him in favor of her exiled lover Heh Lung, Aquala chooses one other guy and Bachu for the sacrifice to "Old Ancestor". When a tribesman begs Aquala to spare Bachu because she was the former chief's daughter, Aquala unleashes the Little Ghost - a flying, toothy Murder Muppet that chews through the dissenter's neck and burrows out through his chest, clutching its victim's heart so the dying man can see it - all of which is quite messy, it goes without saying.

With no further disagreements voiced (Aquala, it must be admitted, has a very forceful management style), Bachu and the other sacrifice are dragged into the temple. Yuen tells his fellow Peeping Toms to go fetch the Professor and reinforcements - *he's* going to help Bachu.

Inside the temple, Aquala splashes buckets of blood over a stone sarcophagus while Bachu and the Other Guy are tied to nearby stakes. The witch doctor and his henchmen beat a hasty retreat as the coffin begins to smoke and shake. Yuen sneaks in and watches in astonishment as the sarcophagus opens and a skeleton, tightly cloaked in mummified skin, rises from the tomb.

Well, there's only one thing to do at a point like this, and it is *to have a kung fu fight with the skeleton*. In a Western film, this would be done with stop-motion animation, or given the state of current technology, a computer generated skeleton. But here, it is accomplished with a life-sized skeleton, most likely a combination of rod and cable puppets - *and more surprising yet, I buy it*. It seems so much more *real* to me this way, I am more than willing to overlook the times the puppet's obvious stiffness and lack of mass breaks the illusion - and such moments are amazingly few.

Gaining a few seconds, Yuen tries to untie the Other Guy, but fails as Old Ancestor lays hands on the unfortunate, and Yuen must fall back and try to release Bachu, instead. Old Ancestor rips the guy's head off and then *proceeds to suck out his spinal cord*. This has the effect of enabling Old Ancestor to morph into a winged, *Alien*-type creature with Ultra-Slime dripping from its maw. Bachu and Yuen decide to run - apparently a very wise course of action, as Old Ancestor does not follow.

Outside the village, Bachu splits off as Yuen meets the Professor and the reinforcements and everyone decides to get the hell out of Dodge - too late, as the wrathful Worm Tribe descends on the camp, slaughtering everyone except Yuen and the Professor - Aquala has something *special* arranged for them. Back at the temple, the witch doctor dumps some green concoction on the Professor, causing the man to scream in agony and literally start tearing off his own skin, revealing thousands upon thousands of worms crawling in his flesh and around his entrails. It's a real *Chinese horror* kinda moment, if you know what I mean. And I know some of you do.

For Yuen, Aquala pulls out a charm which was imbedded in the chest of one of his henchmen killed in the attack, and forces it down Yuen's throat. This sets upon him the "blood curse" - his veins begin to swell and burst. Aquala tells him there will be seven blood curses, and then he will be dead... and, like all good Bond villains, he leaves our hero to die.

Well, like all good heroes, Yuen escapes, but there's still that bothersome blood curse, which is still doing a terrific job of killing him. But he is found by Bachu, who cuts a similar charm out of *her* chest, and feeds it to Yuen, saving his life.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are now only 35 minutes into this movie.

As Yuen finishes his flashback, another vein bursts. Wisely surmises that Bachu's charm has only forestalled the Blood Curse for a year. The Curses are striking once every 24 hours, and Yuen has only five days to live - unless he goes to Thailand. Wisely promises to follow in a day or so. And who should enter but Tsai-hung, who *still* wants to do a story on the Brave Young Doctor, and who, as luck would have it, is Wisely's cousin! *AI!*

Trekking to Thailand, Yuen finds Heh Lung barricaded in his house. Aquala's reach, he tells Yuen, has extended far, and the sorcerer has even entered into alliances with local gangsters. To punctuate this, several dozen thugs bust in through doors and windows and attack the two men. (Yes! Big fight scene!) Both men hold their own very well, dishing out huge discount volumes of pain to the bad guys - until Yuen's third Blood Curse bursts, causing him to falter, and giving the thugs an opening. Luckily for our heroes, Tsai-hung has once again followed Yuen against all orders (or sense) and has used Daddy's unlimited charge account to pick up some mercenaries and enough heavy weaponry to take care of several dozen bad guys (Important lesson learned: Thai mercenaries and arms merchants take plastic).

Heh Lung takes Yuen and Tsai-hung to a village near the Worm Tribe, populated by peaceful types. But the peaceful types are worried now: all the children of the village have vanished. The Little Ghost spell only lasts three years, and to renew it, Aquala requires the blood of a hundred children. Heh Lung and Yuen scout the Worm Tribe hangout, but lethal booby-traps take out most of their party. Tsai-hung has tagged along yet again, but once more proves herself useful; she studied Viet Cong deathtrap technology while she was in America, and helps our two heroes get past the other booby traps. She and Yuen argue while Heh Lung checks ahead; Yuen manages to get her angry enough to make her go back to the village... but once she is out of sight, she stumbles through a trap door.

Heh Lung returns to report the children are in cages and heavily guarded. He and Yuen seek out Bachu, whose Ghost Curse, guided by Aquala, has disfigured half her face. She tells Yuen that Sacred Ashes can heal all curses, but the only ones in the land reside in the eyes of a great statue of Buddha in a mountain cave - but no one who has ever gone there before has returned alive. Of course.

Yuen and Heh Lung return to the village to await the mercenaries, only to find that Tsai-hung has not returned. Determining her to be a prisoner of Aquala, they do what heroes do best: they storm the castle. Charging through the village in their Jeep, they drive it up the steps of the temple and rampage through its halls coming into the main chamber and finding Tsai-hung tied to a stake - and also finding that Aquala has gone ahead with the Little Ghost ritual, and the last of the children has just been murdered.

Time for another stop, here; I have to say that I have seen a lot of cinematic death and horror in my time. But few things have shocked and horrified me down to the core as this scene, mercifully brief as it is, where a screaming, whimpering child is passed into a giant crushing device. It's obviously a variation of an old stage illusion - the child ducks down while the fake stone plates pass safely overhead, but *still*....

Try *that* in a Western movie.

Tsai-hung is rescued and taken to the village, but *hee hee hee* (yes, Aquala is one of *those* villains, the ones who like to go *hee hee hee*), the Spunky Young Reporter is under a spell, has soon armed herself with a sword, and is attacking everyone in sight, especially the nimble Yuen. (The village, I noted, is one of the most easily breakable villages I have ever seen, but that could be because there wasn't any glass around to break.) Wisely (remember him?) and his wife Su arrive, startling Tsai-hung and causing her to hesitate long enough to be subdued. Bachu arrives, and orders a bath of the blood of "black goats, oxen, dogs, cats, lizards and eagles" to break the spell.

Preparing to journey to the mountain to procure the sacred ashes, Yuen's sixth curse bursts. Wisely tells him that the last curse will open his heart and cause him to bleed to death. Then, discovering that Aquala has started the Little Ghost ritual, Wisely orders up the placenta of a pregnant cow and the blood of a black dog - it does *not* pay to be an animal in this village.

Heh Lung and Yuen reach the monumental statue of the Buddha and climb to its lap, where they are beset not only by various booby-traps meant to skewer and squash intruders, but also a legion of orange-robed, bungee-jumping, kung fu-fighting monks. (Yes! Big fight scene!) After a pitched battle, Heh Lung finally prevails upon the monks, convincing them that they only want the ashes to help people - and the statue aids their cause by *shedding tears*. They prise out the eyes of the idol, but this also causes some sort of mystical repercussion, as the emptied eyesockets gush blood and the head falls away from the idol, rolling after our heroes as they frantically try to avoid being crushed. Probably the best running-away-from-an-enormous-boulder-rolling-just-a-couple-of-feet-behind-you scenes that I have witnessed since *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Good is agile, though, and Yuen survives to swallow the eerily glowing sacred ashes just as his last curse is about to burst.

Next challenge: they only have four hours to get the other eye back to Bachu to cure her.

Well, next *next* challenge: Heh Lung and Yuen return to the village, only to find the last remnants of a battle between the villagers, the mercs and the Worm Tribe. Wisely tells them that Tsai-hung and Bachu were both captured by Aquala.

To be sure, the witch doctor is once again slopping blood all over Old Ancestor's coffin, going *hee hee hee* and making with the bad guy gloating. Heh Lung and Yuen arrive on the scene and a fight starts (*Yes!*) between Heh Lung and his old enemy, with the result that Aquala is eventually knocked onto Old Ancestor's sarcophagus, and the beastie, tired of waiting, yanks the screaming witch doctor into the coffin. Not satisfied by that little snack, though, Old Ancestor bursts from his coffin and slips into *Alien* mode, flapping its wings and pursuing our heroes all over the sacrificial chamber.

Help arrives in the form of Su (remember her?) and some of the mercenaries, though Old Ancestor doesn't seem too impressed by their machine guns and disposes of the mercs in various bloody, messy ways. Su then releases the Little Ghost, which Wisely had captured and turned against its creators. The Murder Muppet does pretty well for a while, causing gaping wounds and generally cutting up Old Ancestor in a messy fashion, but the Big Beastie eventually gets its claws on the Little Ghost and reduces it to its constituent molecules (messily). Now our heroes seem truly doomed! Wait a minute... where's Wisely?

Oh, there he is, at the top of the stairs with... *a rocket launcher??!* *Woo-hoo!* Leave it to Chow Yun Fat! Two rockets later, Old Ancestor is reduced to Old Ancestor kibble. Messy Old Ancestor kibble.

Victory comes at a price, however: the time limit is up on the sacred ashes, and Bachu must remain disfigured forever. Heh Lung swears his love for her regardless; "Beauty lies in one's heart, not in one's face," Wisely tells his wife. The end.

What impressed me the most about *Seventh Curse* was its sheer *exuberance*. After a decade of mainly formulaic horror movies, all of which seemed to move at the same pace, this pulp-fiction upstart was more than a breath of fresh air, it was the whole damn tank of oxygen. Here was the type of movie I wanted to see, something with a little bit of everything. The only American director I could think of doing similar work was [Sam Raimi](#). Though director Lam Ngai Kai doesn't employ Raimi's discombobulated camera style, the directors share a zest for outrageous situations and a sure hand in their action pieces (though I give Lam the advantage in the action field). Lam would later score another hit along similar lines in the fantasy-based *Peacock King*, and prove he was equally unafraid of excess in the hyper-violent [Story of Ricky](#). His work is definitely worth checking out.

The movie also has other things going for it besides heart - several times a sort of eerie beauty insinuates itself into the gruesome proceedings, as when Heh Lung and Yuen look up from their climb up the Buddha statue to discover that they have been silently surrounded by reposing monks, apparently from nowhere; or when Tsai-hung awakens cured from her zombie spell, and the steaming dark blood that she has slept in has turned white, like milk. Adding to these agreeable aesthetics is an honest-to-God orchestral score that enriches the experience suitably.

I have to say, however, that the movie hasn't aged that well with me. As an attempt, as mentioned earlier, to cover all movie bases, there are some comedy scenes between Maggie Cheung and Andy Lau that simply don't translate well, and I fast forward through these with wild abandon. I find myself aggravated more than ever at dubious plotting - what, a hundred children aren't worth our heroes risking their lives, but let Maggie Cheung get captured, and suddenly they're deathmatching their way through the enemy stronghold, armed with only a bow and arrow, and a shotgun (admittedly, one of those Chinese shotguns that knocks its target back a dozen feet)? Doesn't say too much for our heroes, does it?

Oh, well, the movie still thrills the jaded palate of this viewer, and should fulfill the same function for the similarly genre-fried (extra crispy!). Like a lot of the great HK flicks of this period, it reminds you that films - even horror films - used to be *fun*. And if that last fight reminds you more of the final battle in [Inferno](#) than the closing fight of a more conventional action-horror story, say, *End of Days*, well, so much the better, right? Right? (by Freeman Williams)

**Shanghai Affairs (Hong Kong, 1998: Donnie Yen)** - What I appreciate now is a martial arts movie that has a very attractive plot and the right mood setting for that plot. After seeing "King of the Sea" and not being very impressed, I was happy to feel refreshed after watching "Shanghai Affairs" knowing that what I had just seen was extremely original.



The plot involves Donnie Yen and his apprentice, Bond, both of whom work as doctors who have just moved to a small area in Shanghai, China. The villagers, who are delighted to see the newcomers, are also in a bit of trouble from the Axe Gang, headed by Yu Rong Guang, who does a superb job of acting as usual. The Axe Gang has an inside connection with a powerful someone in Shanghai who would allow them to take the village land in order to build a casino. Donnie and Bond become involved in the conflict and from that comes a great amount of character development and emotion towards everyone including the menacing Yu Rong Guang.

Perhaps the most attractive aspect of this recent (1998) film is the cinematography. Everything is clear and crisp. There wasn't a single shot that was incomplete. Whenever a fight occurred, I could see everything that was happening, and it was a great sensation. Donnie Yen apparently enjoyed the Japanese way of filming dark moods by taking old abandoned buildings and lots (LOTS) of leaves floating and putting it all into a shot with almost no sunlight due to the thick clouds in the sky. In addition to that, the score to "Shanghai Affairs" consists of a low bellow during the fights, and still a somewhat dark mood during the more uplifting scenes.

On top of that, the fights were indeed very imaginative. But I'd like to address a small complaint I had. Actually 3. The first is that there were some group fights that were too exadurated. Donnie takes on 40 guys with hatchets, with a tree branch. I started thinking he was Wong Fei Hung. Secondly, the sounds weren't effective for the blocks during the action. Had Donnie used the same ones from the old Jackie movies which consisted of simple slaps then it would have been, well, better. Secondly, there are 3 or so small (3 seconds each) scenes shot from behind a fighter that have him just flailing his arms around at nothing, and still the sound effects are going. It just looks too corny to even watch, but luckily those parts are so sparse you may even miss them. Now, the good stuff. The fights were great. For example, there is a scene in the beginning where the axe gang attacks the villagers. Donnie and Bond intervene and, although some action is slightly exaderrated, they do some good looking ass kicking. Donnie, at one point, uses the neck ties of 2 men to hold them together, and with them he blocks one man with an axe, tangles him up, and sends all 3 into the wall of a store.

Another refreshing scene was a good 1 minute fight with Donnie and Yu using Chin Na on eachother. It looks painful, which was the intent. Funny thing was that I heard bones crunch, and they just walked away afterwards. Oh well, it looked great.

The highlight of the film, IMHO, comes at the end when Yu and Donnie face off for the last time (They have a great looking bout in the middle as well, but it seemed as though Donnie had a double at one point...!?). The camera work here is totally admirable and absolutely effective in showing the ability of both actors. I'm telling everyone right now, YU RONG GUANG IS UNDERUSED, UNDERPAID, AND UNDERAPPRECIATED. He needs to direct his own movie where he stars as the main guy, and does lots of Wu Shu, cause the guy is AMAZING, and he's OLD TOO!! For those who didn't know it, he plays the main Imperial Guard in Jackie Chan's Shanghai Noon, who also fights Jackie at the end open handedly and then with weapons. Also, see Supercop 2 for some of his talent. Anyways, now that everyone knows how great this guy is (You can also rent Jet Li's The Enforcer (which is actually My Father Is a Hero with a cooler name) at Blockbuster now, he's in that and does some good moves and I personally think that he outshines Jet Li in it. K I'm done), I can go on about "Shanghai Affairs". (He's pretty buff too, for an old guy, I mean he must be in his 40's, maybe, dunno the guy moves like a madman, faster than Jackie at times, sorry). The scene here shows Yu fighting against Donnie first with only hand to hand combat. Yu on the left, Donnie on the right, but a different cut for both of them. First we see Donnie block for a bit and we can also see Yu's arms going crazy, and does some interesting punches, some of which look like Eagle moves (Like I said, the guy moves). Then the camera moves back to Yu who's doing his thing, very well too mind you. Then back to Donnie, blocking and occasionally throwing a punch, then back to Yu, then to Donnie, then to Yu, and then to Donnie again. It's all done extremely well. Leaves falling out of trees and the old building in the background complement the scene so well you think that some trajedy just occurred even if you hadn't seen the rest of the movie. Next, we get an awesome showcase of Yu's ability to just kick and kick repeatedly (although there is one time when we catch a glimpse of a double throwing a fake leg out at Donnie, which is a common HK stunt, and was used in Police Story and Who Am I?). Yu does a great jumping roundhouse that extends perfectly, and lots of great forward snap kicks.

Finally, the two go inside (somehow Yu kicks Donnie from the side of the building to the inside, but it's good they go inside anyways). Here Yu breaks out the axe on a chain, and it's good. No doubles here, it's just Yu and Donnie. Donnie does a very cool HK spin unattended, onto Yu, followed by a knee to his head. I'll let you see the rest.

What did I learn? I learned that, as I said for a whole page, Yu Rong Guang is underused. He is an expert. He is better than any American martial artist on screen. He is faster than most HK martial artists. He moves better than most HK martial artists. He's older than most HK martial artists. Imagine Ken Lo in Drunken Master 2. When we sat there and wondered, "Why the hell don't they put him in more movies? He's great, he looks good when he fights. Jackie picked a great contestant, he's as good as Jackie dammit!" the same thing occurs in "Shanghai Affairs" with Yu. Plus, the guy can act, which is great as well. Oh and don't forget Donnie, he's always great. But I just wanna say that Yu

easily matches him. Since the two are so different though, I can't tell who is better or who would win in a fight. All I can say is that they're both great, and Yu needs to be in more GOOD movies.

I give it an 8.5/10, the other point would go for more action and less of the group fighting.

**\*UPDATE\*** I learned that I am stupid. I didn't set the soundtrack to the original Cantonese one, and I actually thought that they were speaking Mandarin. Good dubbing if you ask me. Because the soundtrack is different, I got a new experience when I watched the fights again, and I liked them even more. For that reason alone, I update the review to a 9/10 (I had a 9 before, but I changed the original to an 8.5, this to a 9, due to the low number of fights).

**\*UPDATE 7-20\*** I watched it again, and I liked it much more than before in the alternate soundtrack (Cantonese). Not only that, but I have more appreciation for the Chin Na (joint lock techniques) sequence that Donnie Yen and Guang go through for about a minute as well as for Bond (Donnie's assistant) who, much to my surprise, doesn't just flail his arms as much as I previously thought. I know now why this movie goes for \$80 on 2 vhs tapes at some sites and why it's in such high demand. (by Eric Jacobus of The Stunt People)

**Shanghai Grand (Hong Kong, 1996: Poon Man-Kit)** - I had high hopes for this 1996 Film Workshop adaptation of a popular early 1980s TV series that starred Chow Yun-Fat and Ray Lui in the roles played here by Leslie Cheung and Andy Lau. For one thing, it is a favorite of a Hong Kong movie friend and Brian also had good things to say about it. For another, Leslie Cheung is known for being more astute than many other Hong Kong performers -- including his way more prolific co-star -- with regards to his choice of which work he is willing to be a part. Then there was the promise that came from this offering having a 1930s Shanghai setting and its producer, Tsui Hark, seeming to be able to do more substantive things with period pieces than (more) temporally contemporary works.

SHANGHAI GRAND gets off on a promisingly powerful note with an opening scene that takes place on a boat being buffeted by high waves and stormy weather. The film's audience gets thrown straight into an intense situation which involves the torture of a couple of betrayed members of "the Taiwan People's League" (in a bid to discover which of them is a man named Hui Man Keung), the cold-blooded machine-gunning of all but one of the captives plus a gun battle between the one escapee and the archvillainess along with her henchmen (while an individual later revealed to be the chief traitor of the patriotic Taiwanese Chinese cause looks on). It also is via these circumstances and on this vessel that we get introduced to three people who will play key parts in the rest of this action drama's proceedings.

Leslie Cheung -- silly little moustache, stubble and all -- is mesmerizing as the smoldering Hui Man Keung (and IMHO, it is really only when he is on screen that this often wonderfully atmospheric yet at times surprisingly hollow feeling work has a heart). Almen Wong spices up things with her portrayal of the formidable female Japanese collaborator who unfortunately does not have that large a part in SHANGHAI GRAND. To keep the elements of surprise that ought to remain in certain salient plot twists that occur later in this multi-stranded movie, I think it best to not reveal who plays the third of this trio of characters. However, the reader -- and (potential) viewer of this film -- would do well to note that Hui's chief visual memory of one of his hated enemies is that this individual is a smoker of cigars. Similarly, a cheongsam's pattern is what the revenge-seeking Hui utilizes to identify the sadistic woman responsible for the death of his comrades.

For a not particularly ideal or logical reason, SHANGHAI GRAND has a second story line whose focus is an individual who literally rises from being a nightsoil collector to a powerful Triad boss. Andy Lau plays Ding Lik as a man whose ambitions are stoked in part by his wanting to be considered worthy of his wealthy patron's daughter (The Mainland Chinese actress, Ning Jing, plays Fung Ching Ching while the Taiwanese actor, Wu Hsing Kuo, plays her gangster father, Fung King Yin). For me, this character -- but not necessarily the actor who plays him -- is the film's major weak component. One big problem is that the makers of the movie appeared to be counting on the viewers to be sympathetic to Ding just because he comes in the form of the good-looking and often elegantly attired Andy Lau. As such, someone like me who thinks the Cantopop Sky King is okay but not great will find it difficult to understand why Amanda Lee's minor character would fall for him, and -- more significantly -- will neither be shocked nor aghast that the woman he loves does not return his affections (This even without knowing that much about this girlish character who also is too colorless for my liking).

The hokey manner in which Hui and Ding's paths cross and lives get intertwined is something else that occurs in a manner that does not help the cause of SHANGHAI GRAND. At the same time, and worse, there is a predictability to the film that comes from one's knowing that it really is only a complete piece of fiction. Consequently, some way before its end, it ceases to be the effective affecting work that its makers seemed to have sought for it to be. Perhaps it's no coincidence then that its director (cum co-scriptwriter), Poon Man Kit, does not appear to have been given a production to helm in the five years or so since this disappointingly flawed movie -- which nevertheless has a

choice scene involving a boa constrictor! -- was first released in Hong Kong cinemas. (by YTSL of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Shanghai Shanghai (Hong Kong, 1990: Teddy Robin Kwan)** - Set in the 1930's, Little Tiger (YB) is an idealistic young man, newly arrived to Shanghai, and seeking his brother, Big Tiger (GL), an officer in the British army. Through serendipitous events, he is involved in a gangland feud. Mary Sung (AM) is the old flame of Big Tiger and the goddaughter of Mr. Chin (SH), a powerful underworld figure. Little Tiger falls in with an acrobatic troupe, and through more odd events, they end up running a club for Mr. Chin. Mary is involved with the Revolutionary Party and draws Little Tiger in to help recover the funds stolen by her godfather. But Chin seeks to make scapegoats of Mary, Little Tiger, and Big Tiger, and a confrontation ensues at his mansion.

Fight #1 --- The Heaven Cabaret - The club at which a gangland heist occurs. It's really a big shootout, but Biao gets to throw a kick here and there as well as performing a couple of stunts, one in which he drops from a chandelier and then rolls away just as it crashes down on him.

Fight #2 --- Little Tiger vs thugs - A very small skirmish following a public performance by an acrobatic troupe. Not much, as it's so short, but Biao does a nice double kick off a bench.

Fight #3 --- Little Tiger vs Mary - Takes place at the Heaven Cabaret after Little Tiger becomes its manager. YB and AM have a cool dance sequence. Their dancing is fantastic and laced with kung fu as she *not* so subtly attacks him.

Fight #4 --- End fight at Chin's Mansion - Mary vs Chin's gang -- AM is really fun to watch here. She demonstrates great kicking ability and even gets in some swordplay (though it's nothing classical). She's obviously doubled for some of the stunts, but she's very impressive selling her fights and beautiful to watch.

Little Tiger vs Chin -- a Sammo/Biao throwdown! It's a good fight! Biao does a few wire-assisted maneuvers but this is still full of hard-hitting old fashioned choreography. Sammo uses some hand shapes and sneaks in his usual back kick. Biao is not so acrobatic in this but his kicking is great, and he pulls off a sweet leg sweep on Sammo at one point.

I sort of like this film. It's not as action driven as I would've liked. There was certainly opportunity to have done more, especially fleshing out some of the early fight sequences. This is primarily a drama-driven film, but the end certainly delivers a bang-up end fight! And while I'm not the biggest Anita Mui fan, I like her in this. Her fight is pretty boss! (The first time I watched this was with a friend who isn't big on Asian cinema, and he was immediately smitten with her.)

Some of the plot gets confusing and the character development isn't the best....but who cares? The Sammo/Biao fight is the main reason to own this, and it is definitely a rewatchable fight! The choreography is fast and they don't appear to be holding back. I say whether you're a completionist or not, you ought to GET THIS! (by Scott Blasingame)

**Shaolin Popey (Taiwan, 1994: Kevin Chu Yen-Ping)** - Chu Yen-Ping managed to find a fairly long lasting, commercial element in this flick. Or rather two. Or rather two kids. Yes, little Kok Siu-Man and Sik Siu-Lung formed a kung fu-comedy team of wacky and stern/butt-kicking respectively. They were later put to use in the semi-sequel as well as in *China Dragon* and *Super Mischieves*. Under Chu's very commercial direction, it's mainly Kok's show along with Taiwanese heartthrob and ten times less talented Aaron Kwok wannabee of the era Jimmy Lin that take center stage in what definitely is kid's entertainment but a movie that corresponds ever so slightly to director Chu's old habit of caring for absurd, illogical details.

Basically patented after the dopey high school American comedy formula, the beginning is an unwarranted MV for the great lead Jimmy Lin, showing how great Jimmy Lin is. Even signs of being Taiwan's Tom Cruise of *Cocktail* fame are evident but when the actual story starts, director Chu's structure is very clear. Lin's Spinach character wants Vivian Hsu's Annie. Annie dates the school bully. Pearl (Hilary Tsui) helps Spinach who will come to realize during the last scene who he loves. Starting over at least twice with the high school comedy structure that begins with pranks at home and ends with family dinner, Chu is resting comfortably. Although he goes daring places for the designed entertainment that it is by creating a locker room sequence for the voluptuous Vivian Hsu (who began making Category III pictures the year after), the marginal delight *Shaolin Popey* is represented by a few key tangents. One is a variant of the Street Fighter scene in *City Hunter* and later our main characters take refuge in the Shaolin Temple. The seemingly real world is now part of the Wuxia universe, comedy is punctuated by cartoon

sounds and the flick briefly turns into *Home Alone* by the end. It's easily digestible, thoroughly silly and a far cry from well-honed in the wirework department. But considering, Chu Yen-Ping doesn't embarrass himself as such. Compare with his army training flicks such as *Forever Friends*, starring an even more annoying Jimmy Lin, and you'll see the gigantic difference. Kingdom Yuen, Michael Lee and Paul Chun also appear. (by So Good Reviews)

**Shaolin Popey II: Messy Temple (Taiwan, 1994: Kevin Chu Yen-Ping)** - For the at most mildly related sequel, there's no build-up towards the Shaolin in Shaolin Popey. The kids Kok Siu-Man and Sik Siu-Lung are already there in the Shaolin temple, under the guidance of Michael Lee's abbot but mostly they're taken on various shenanigans with Ng Man-Tat's Senior. Feeling very Hong Kong, Taiwan's Chu Yen-Ping knows he doesn't have to show any interest in structure and wit. Alongside the mild story of The Evil Sect assassin Yellow Lemmon (Dicky Cheung in truly horrid super-villain gear) failing at most of his attempts, the trio of Kok, Sik and Ng mostly wander to and from one silly skit to the next. See them for instance learn the fart stance and do heavy duty stunt work in all manner of films for support of their eating habits. All for an almost unbearable amount of reels. Thankfully Chu gets other ideas and remembers cartoonish craziness of his past.

Starting with Adam Cheng in a cameo as himself and various parodies of the martial arts genre such as torturous stances from *Drunken Master* and an appearance by another group of Amazon fighters from *Armour of God*, Chu is clearly allowed to show his care for absurd detail. Difference this time, most of what we see are parodies and not shameless theft. Now that IS a shame, despite we getting glimpses into Chu's manic mind. The 18 Bronzemen stops by, climactic techniques from *Butterfly & Sword* pop up but topping it off and taking *Shaolin Popey II - Messy Temple* into sporadically likeable territory is the sight of Sik Siu-Lung being fed breast milk by Kingdom Yuen in order to utilize his kid drunken boxing! Michelle Yeoh has a very minor cameo while Yuen Wah and Mark Houghton also stop by. (by So Good Reviews)

**She Shoots Straight (Hong Kong, 1990: Corey Yuen)** - This incredibly intense film almost appears to be a family drama disguised as a girls with guns flick – or perhaps it's the reverse – but either way the film is a strong emotional mix of drama and action that should keep you riveted to your seat.

It revolves around the Huang family, which comprises of five cops – four of them women – and their strong mother. The son (Tony Leung Ka Fai) marries an outsider – yet another policewoman (Joyce Godenzi) – and this greatly disturbs the balance within the family. In particular Carina Lau is virulently against the marriage and it is her anger that sets off a chain of events that leads to some tragic results. Joyce is resented on two counts – she is advancing quicker through the force than her husband and then in a powerful scene it is revealed that much of the resentment has to do with her being of mixed blood.

This last point is fairly intriguing in that Joyce "Mina" Godenzi is of mixed blood – Australian and Chinese – and one has to wonder if this did in fact greatly hinder her movie career in HK. Like many actresses before her she was discovered by entering the Miss Hong Kong beauty contest and was offered a few roles after that. Her major break came when Sammo Hung offered her a job in his film *Eastern Condors* in which her smallish role of a Cambodian guerilla is simply astonishing in its intensity. *Deadly China Dolls* reports her saying of Sammo "Sammo is the least sexist film-maker in the world. He treats women just like men." In *She Shoots Straight*, Joyce again brings a real intense presence to the film – and an amazing physically grueling performance. The fact that before going into acting she had no martial arts training is hard to believe after seeing her in a few films. Some of the action that she is clearly performing in this film is simply astounding. But surprisingly, she only made some dozen films over her career – and one has to wonder whether prejudices about her mixed parentage had something to do with this. She did of course marry Sammo – so it isn't a tragic tale by any means!

So though the inter-family dynamics has some powerful elements (one scene in particular between mother, daughters and Joyce is incredibly emotional) – underneath it all lies a great girls with guns film that has some absolutely splendid action scenes – and intense action scenes. The film begins with one in which the sisters and Joyce have to protect a visiting Princess at a fashion show and in a kidnapping attempt both Joyce and Carina blow away a number of the bad guys – but then Joyce has to chase some others down on a motorcycle.

There are other great action scenes later – Yuen Wah has a good one on his own – but this all leads to the ending in which Joyce and Carina go after Wah and his many men on board a ship. The two of them are thrilling to watch. I can't think of too many films in which I have seen Carina do action but she is very credible here – but even more so incredibly cathartic as she takes two machetes and cuts her way through a bloody swathe of bad guys. And then just to top it all off – Joyce and Filipino actress Agnes Aurelio square off in a classic girl on girl fight.

All I can say is that this film was a great way to start off the new millennium. It has much of everything I love about HK films in it – great female roles, topnotch action – but most important is simply the heart and emotional resonance of this film. Sammo both produced the film and has a small role in which he has only a few moments of action against Yuen Wah and a few of his minions. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Shogun and Little Kitchen (Hong Kong, 1992: Ronny Yu)** - Ronny Yu (*The Bride with White Hair*) directed this warm and fuzzy family comedy about poor restaurateur Ng Man-Tat, runaway Leon Lai, and Tat's uncle, the high-flying Yuen Biao. Tat's restaurant is in trouble, but luckily Yuen Biao's acrobatic cooking style saves the day. Crowds arrive to gawk as Yuen flips, jumps and cooks up a storm - and the food is good, too. The bucks roll in, pleasing Tat, but soon local sponsorship arrives to try and sign Yuen to a tour. Even worse, local triads are breathing down Tat's neck, and runaway rich kid Leon Lai starts an uninteresting romance with Maggie Siu. Standard formula and annoyingly cute subplots drag the film down, but Yuen Biao's athletic stuntwork makes the movie a fun, if not crucial viewing experience. The film doesn't challenge you in any way, but it's really not meant to. Undemanding fun. (by Kozo of LoveHKFilm)

**Skinny Tiger & Fatty Dragon (Hong Kong, 1991: Lau Kar-Wing)** – aka **Nutty Kickbox Cops** - SH is "Fatty" Dragon and KM is "Baldy" (not "Skinny") Tiger, a pair of gung-ho detectives on the police force obsessed with taking down the drug lord, Wing (LKW).

Fight #1 --- Baldy vs 3 robbers - The opening fight takes place in a convenience store. While it's nothing special, it's not bad. It's more of a comical fight but there's some good hits in it. (2 of the robbers sport awful-looking mullets --- a haircut that looks terrible in any culture.)

Fight #2 --- Fatty vs jewel robbers - Impersonating a robber crashing a robbery already in progress, Fatty takes on about 7 dudes. This is good stuff here. Some good kicks that send guys crashing into display cases. (Sammo's fighting style is a slight impersonation of Bruce Lee and plays throughout the film.) He throws a beautiful side kick catapulting 1 fellow backwards. Sweet!

Fight #3 --- Baldy/Fatty vs Ah Lai (CN) and a transvestite - Takes place in a department store's women's dressing room. It's brief but good. It's mainly CN and KM. She can take a hit and throw some of her own. She sells her fights well. There's a short exchange between Fatty and the transvestite who gets away but it's all Sammo.

Fight #4 --- Construction Site Fight - Baldy & Fatty vs a buttload of thugs. Well, mainly it's Sammo taking on everybody while KM deals with CN and a couple of goons. Great fight from Sammo here! Good flow and good choreography! He even uses 2 short pieces of pipe Escrima style against pipe and machete wielding gangsters. He then chases their boss, Tak, into a nearby restaurant kitchen. Sammo knocks him all over the place. Tak then runs into the dining area where a reception is being held for the Police Deputy Commissioner. It's great fun to watch Sammo leaping on and tackling Tak into numerous tables. There's some great falls.

Interlude: Because of their antics, Baldy and Fatty are forced to go on vacation. They go to Singapore where they meet 2 girls and go to a karaoke bar one evening. KM sings while Sammo dances with the 2 girls. This is reminiscent of Jim Carrey's bit in "Once Bitten". I love to watch Sammo dance. He's good! He cracks me up and he really hams it up here. Then it's back to Hong Kong...

Fight #5 --- Ah Lai vs 2 female Thai killers - This is pretty brutal. It's a good fight and CN sells it but she doesn't stand a chance.

Fight #6 --- Baldy vs 2 hitmen - This occurs at his girlfriend's apartment. It's not a bad fight. He especially has a good row with Mark Houghton (playing one of the hitmen).

Fight #7 --- Fatty vs 2 female Thai killers - Great fight! He catches them leaving his apartment after they've attacked his father. The fight moves to an eatery in the alley adjacent to his apartment building. *This is a hard-hitting fight! Sammo unleashes some devastating kicks on these chicks!* (He is doubled for 1 kick; don't see why. Still, it doesn't detract from the fight sequence.) This is one of my favorite fights of the film.

Fight #8 --- End Fight - Oh, where to begin! It's Baldy and Fatty vs Wing and his gang! It's absolutely fantastic! KM gets some good choreography though his fights are still mostly comedic. His best bits are against LKW who is awesome!

But Sammo goes into full-blown Bruce Lee mode! He even uses nunchucks at one point. There were a couple of wire-assisted bits but they're almost undetectable and there were some quick cuts, too, but it wasn't bad. But as always, Sammo absolutely amazes me as a kicker. He's great about showcasing power-kicks and he knows how to do it. His end fight with LKW is great though there is a little doubling taking place in bits. It even segues into a knife fight for a few moments.

Well, what can I say? This is one of Sammo's best modern actioners! The comedy is cheesy but the action is great! And it's spread fairly evenly throughout the film. There's a little lag in places but it picks up quick. And hey! He dances! Can't beat that! If you've been meaning to get this but have left it on your wish-list for other films, stop wasting your time! GET IT! GET IT! GET IT! (by Scott Blasingame)

**Sleazy Dizzy (Hong Kong, 1990: Chor Yuen)** - Hong Kong funnyman Stephen Chow plays common thief Sing, who crosses paths with Hong Kong stock company employee Ling (Sibelle Hu), and end up joining her in helping an amnesia-plagued undercover cop to regain his memory and locate the whereabouts of the 50 million dollars cash used in a drug deal. In the meantime, they try to avoid becoming victims of the crime-lord that was responsible for embezzling 50 million dollars out of the stock company.

The plot is pretty simple but easy to follow, and there are very little surprises and twists to the story. However, you'll be entertained by the large amount of comedy, from Chow's witty humor to Hu's slapstick Karate moves. The unending gun fights and the protagonists trying to outrun the bad guys are also entertaining to watch.

The acting wasn't bad and the music score ranges from clownish to mysterious. There also are a few plot holes here and there. But, overall, it's a good old-fashion crime comedy that will give you several laughs. (by OllieSuave-007 of IMDB)

**Slickers vs. Killers (Hong Kong, 1991: Sammo Hung)** - In the early 90's, life in Kowloon was crazy, especially if you were a dumpy city slicker of a salesman whose life was in danger from 2 masked killers.

This is a film that Sammo Hung did through his own company, Bojon Film Co. Ltd. It was a venture he started after leaving Golden Harvest after 20 years. This was supposedly due to a dispute he had with Raymond Chow after some poor box office performances, and the film *Into The Fire*, which Sammo had produced, being pulled too quickly from theaters.

Sammo Hung directs and stars as Success Hung, a regional salesman who enjoys his job and is so good at it he wins awards. So why is he seeing Dr. Ko (JG), a female psychiatrist? Because his wife Lisa (YL) thinks he needs to for no other reason than the fact that he is content. You see, Hung experiences odd things in his daily life as a salesman, and when he tells his wife, who happens to be a cop, what he sees, she believes him. What she doesn't believe is when she asks him if anything is wrong and he says no. So it is at her behest that he sees Dr. Ko, who likes to use the unorthodox method of constructing an atmosphere of being on the beach or sailing to get her patients to open up.

Hung's life starts to become complicated when 3 things happen simultaneously: (1) a new brassy and competitive saleswoman named Miss Cheng (CC) is hired; (2) he witnesses a gang hit by 2 masked killers, Owl (LCY) and Bat (JC); and (3) his wife's police partner (NS aka Collin Chou) expresses his obvious and blatant desire for her. Hung is nice guy, which isn't to say he's not without his faults, but this soon devolves into everything he does going wrong. (Of course, a few of those instances are merely contrivances that help create confusion and tension in the story, though I think a lot of it is just padding out the film.)

Hung informs his wife of what he's seen, but she refuses to believe him, thinking he's making it all up. Eventually the killers learn of Hung's doctor appointments and pay a visit while he is in session. Hung and Dr. Ko get away. Following a big misunderstanding, Hung, his wife, her partner, and his doctor are all put up in a safehouse for protection. Multiple antics and misunderstandings ensue, creating divisive tension among them. When both the killers and a rival gang find them, it all erupts in a fighting free for all.

The film is fun to watch, and the comedy is quite interesting. Sammo pulls a number of pratfalls throughout the film, especially in the first scene where he's visiting his doctor. Her floor is really slippery, and he amazes me as he falls time and again while trying to get up and walk to the door. The verbal humor has its moments, but I'm sure a lot is lost in translation, though some of it works. Dr. Ko is prone to make assertions, whether spot on or not, and then walk away when challenged. Miss Cheng and Hung's competitiveness in business could have gotten toxic and

stale very quickly, but it doesn't. It hits the right notes, and doesn't overplay its moments. (They have a particularly good scene together where they are both trying to sell phones to Richard Ng, and it doesn't play out the way either of them expects it to. Remember, this is 1991.) And in one particularly odd scene, Hung and his wife are in bed and she's feeling amorous. When he begins describing how he had to run for his life, she encourages him to keep telling her during their lovemaking until her passion only spikes. (Oh, yeah, it's weird.)

As the killers Owl and Bat, Ching Ying and Cheung work well together, but it is Cheung's character Bat that is the most interesting. He is without a doubt psychotic, and the fact that Hung has seen his face and gotten away pushes him towards a mental breakdown. He plays in quite an intense scene where he is both manic and depressed, brimming with tears of madness and sorrow. He just wants to kill, and the fact that Hung escaped from him, on more than one occasion, has him worried that his future of killing is in jeopardy. (Yeah, he's nuts.)

The main choreographer is Brandy Yuen Jan-Yeung (son of Simon Yuen and brother of Yuen Woo Ping), and the fights are well staged. I break the film down into 7 action set pieces, the first being when Hung encounters the killers in a parking garage. The atmosphere is dark, but it plays as a great game of cat and mouse, with Sammo's astounding agility for his girth on full display. The second is at a restaurant where he is supposed to meet his wife for supper, but shows up late. Her partner is there, and he openly antagonizes Hung so that he is challenged to catch the fat man if he can. Now we have a mini-game of cat and mouse, and he is surprised to find that Hung isn't some cowering imbecile, but willing to fight back. The third occurs when Hung meets the killers in a warehouse. The action here is fast and set in close quarters as Sammo runs for his life, ending with a mighty leap from a stack of boxes onto a pile of barrels full of battery acid.

The fourth occurrence is when Hung is visiting his doctor, and the killers arrive. This is one of the best moments in the film action-wise, though it is quite short. Sammo is wearing swimming flippers, and he delivers a beautiful roundhouse kick to Cheung's face in one moment, and a back kick to Ching Ying's later on. It packs both physical comedy and action in a bizarre setting, and I really wish it had gone on a bit longer.

The end fight at the safehouse can be broken into thirds to complete the 7 set pieces. First, the rival gang and the killers arrive at the same time, and Hung, his wife, her partner, and even Dr. Ko, have to deal with them. This has some amazing choreography, especially in some of the confined areas like the hallway and the display room. Yu Li as Lisa is good screen fighter, doing her thing in a tight miniskirt. Once the gangsters are done with, Hung is forced to fight the killers while his wife's partner hangs back. Here he sees his opportunity to be rid of Hung so Lisa will be his. But the killers aren't cutting it (oh, pun!), so once they are dispatched, it's just him and Hung. Meanwhile, Lisa and Dr. Ko are having it out with one another on the roof.

These two fights are fantastic and hard-hitting. The women absolutely whale on one another, and are so bruised and swollen by the end of it, they are almost indistinguishable in their appearance. The battle between Sammo and Ngai Sing (or Collin Chou, as he's better known nowadays) is just sweet. There are some great combos, and Chou is an impressive kicker in his own right. They fight atop display cases and are smashed into them. And it's a great contrast in physicality. You have Sammo's deceptively dumpy physique with its speed, technique, and power against Chou's Asian Adonis good looks, chiseled body, and vicious fighting prowess. The fight ends with a great stunt fall.

*Slickers Vs Killers* is a diamond in the rough with many facets, and is bewilderingly unknown of by many fans of the genre compared to *Pedicab Driver*, but it warrants discovery. No, it's not perfect, and yes, it has some faults with its plot in places. But it has some good humor, solid Sammo action, plenty of rewatchable moments, and never makes you want to just fast-forward to the action. *Get it, people. It may be hard to track down, but it's worth it!* (by Scott Blasingame)

**Spider Force (Hong Kong, 1993: Patrick Kong) – aka Sex For Sale** - Back in the late 90s, the major (legal) distributor of Hong Kong cinema in the USA was Tai Seng. They released movies of all sorts, not to mention HK TV series dubbed in numerous Asian languages (Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong, etc). With the coming of Jackie Chan to the USA and the crescente interest in HK movies, they started hawking any generic action movie they could find to fans at the affordable price of 14.95. They often took movies that had nothing to do with each other and marketed them as part of a "series". The movies I'll be watching for the next several weeks will be culled from these different series.

*Spider Force* was marketed as part of the "China Heat" series, next to *China Heat* and something called *Hard to Die* (probably *Fight to Survive*). It's a nonsensical cops n' robbers movie about Mainland cops teaming up with Hong Kong cops (led by Carter Wong, best known as the elemental who inflates himself in *Big Trouble in Little China*) to bring down a crime boss (he sells heroin, guns and deals in White slavery, too). The crime boss happens to be uncle

of both one of the Hong Kong cops (Sharon Kwok, credited as Michelle Ko) and the wife of one of the Mainland cops. That's mainly excuse for a bunch of shoot-outs and kung fu fights, which Carter Wong himself choreographed. The action is entertaining, even if not up to the standard of Jackie Chan and Sammo Hung. Carter Wong is powerful, if a bit slow. He does get to tangle with Paul Rapovski of *Hitman* fame. The girls' fighting, including adult film actress Pauline Chan, is entertaining, too. Despite some good action, this isn't a good movie. The characters are as thin as rice paper and, even worse, there's rarely any sort of logical progression from one scene to the next. Stuff happens just because the director/writer says so. It makes following the "plot" a chore. So it's Worth watching mainly to see an older Carter Wong in action. (by Blake Matthews)

**Spiritually a Cop (Hong Kong, 1991: Shum Wai)** - A citizen vigilante who impersonates a cop is killed while attempting to prevent a jewel robbery by a gang of transvestites he mistakes for women. His spirit haunts the senior police officer investigating the crime, in an attempt to persuade him to assign a male investigator instead of Lin Lin (Yukari) to the case. He makes sexist statements such as "How can I be killed by women? I am a man!" and "How can women work" or "All women are useless."

This bizarre story involves a scene in which the spirit extends an elongated tongue across Lin Lin's desk, flicking it provocatively until she slaps a book on it. The ghost also prompts another male police officer to make insultingly sexist remarks to Lin Lin - who kicks him through the door while swearing at him in English! The ghost then persuades Lin Lin's superior (her fiancé) that her undercover meeting to buy the stolen diamonds is actually an affair. Lin Lin takes out the criminals in classic Yukari style, finally punching out her suspicious fiancé as well.

This movie veers wildly between spirit and ghost comedy, and brutal violence. The action scenes are actually very well done. Yukari's two fight scenes are reminiscent of "A Book of Heroes" in pace and intensity, featuring spectacular kip-ups and flips seamlessly blended with wonderful kicks. Skip the sexist and homophobic humor. This movie is worth watching for Yukari's fights alone. Watch for cameo appearances by Philip Ko and Eddy Ko. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Stage Door Johnny (Hong Kong, 1990: Wu Ma)** - This at times highly melodramatic 1990 Hong Kong film -- whose setting, for the most part, is 1932 Shanghai -- has two big strikes against it. One of these is the period piece's terribly abrupt and generally unsatisfactory ending. The other is that, on account of its being one of those offerings which has a large cast -- many of whom appear to be members of Jackie Chan's Stuntmen Association (who also put in work as the effort's action choreographers) -- and multi-stranded plot, it really only becomes coherent upon a second viewing. It doesn't help either in terms of structural but also tonal continuity that the movie's makers seem to have tried to pack every kind of genre (bar for supernatural horror) into it.

Despite that which would rank as one of Jackie Chan's lesser productions having such sizeable problems though, this (re)viewer still found the curiously English named STAGE DOOR JOHNNY -- whose Chinese title is the more appropriate "Stage Sisters" -- to be very much worth a watch (and re-watch) and reckons that she might not be alone in feeling this way. One reason for this comes from the film's novel focus being on an all-female -- bar for its father figure ("Pops" is portrayed by director Wu Ma) and musical accompanists (whose "divine tea" (i.e., opium) imbibing leader is played by Lam Ching Ying) -- Chinese opera troupe. As one might imagine, "this floating life" -- as it gets described in the music-filled movie's lyrical main song -- is depicted as being colorful and eventful indeed, both off as well as on stage. Considering the five main personalities involved, the chances are high that this would have been the case even if they didn't ply the trade that they do.

The first opera star to make an appearance in STAGE DOOR JOHNNY is Boss Tsui, a "do ma dan" artiste who: Specializes in playing males; is trained in the acrobatic-oriented Peking Opera style; and gets enlisted by "Pops" to help the Shanghai-based company he heads perform the more popular martial -- as opposed to the less audience-pleasing "civil" -- acts (Kara Hui Ying Hung was a great choice to play this actress but I reckon it would have been even better for her character to not be two months pregnant). The longer serving divas of the Hsiao Ho Chun troupe comprised: Stern Boss Shen, a young widow who specializes in playing "chaste" roles (and is essayed by Anita Mui's older -- and sadly deceased as of April 2000 -- sister, Ann); flamboyant Boss Hsiao (a.k.a. Perfume), who invariably appears on stage with some kind of "Painted Face" (and is played by Wong Yuk Wan); pretty Boss Sai, with whom more than one man gets enamored (who comes in the form of Lai Yin Saan); and dignified Boss Ching, who I reckon is the film's most noble character (and one who Idy Chan endows with quite a bit of class).



Perhaps inevitably, the male personalities of STAGE DOOR JOHNNY pale in comparison to that of its women. However, they really should not have been as one-dimensional and undeveloped as they are. IMHO, this movie -- which possesses some kick-ass action scenes on account of the Chinese Opera folk getting involved in more than one way with a couple of major Triad figures -- would have been so much better served if: More had been known about Waise Lee's Lu Tung Tang other than his being the leader of a group intent on ensuring that the ban on opium was upheld (so that there was one less way for Chinese men to become weak); Lau Siu Ming's Mr. Chang had not been such a stereotypical bad guy; and Ken Lo's character hadn't been as silent as he was strong and adept in the martial arts. As for the rickshaw puller portrayed by Mars: Here's stating that I saw no logical reason for his needing to make the costly sacrifice that he did. Consequently, his final loving act in a work that really does seem intent on showing that "the world is fraught with frustration" was not the moving one it probably was meant to be but, instead, came across as more stupid and senseless than sad.

Something else that I think worthy of mention is the obvious high quality of STAGE DOOR JOHNNY's sets and props. According to Paul Fonoroff, they were originally made to be used in Jackie Chan's "Mr. Canton and Lady Rose" before being recycled in "Shanghai, Shanghai" as well as in this lower budget production (See his "At the Movies", 1998:77). Actually, some of the Chinese Opera costumes look a lot like those worn by some of the performers who appeared in "Peking Opera Blues". If this is indeed so, it sure is a case of good second hand use being made of filmic elements to make a second tier movie which nevertheless does successfully entertain more often than not. (by YTSL of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Sting of the Scorpion (Hong Kong, 1992: Lee Kwok-Lap)** - A few months back I picked up this film in the bargain basement bin at the back of a Chinatown store in which the dust was nearly as high as the VCD. Since they were practically paying me to take it, I did and filed it away under the "likely never to be watched" category. Even though it does have a picture of Anthony Wong on the cover, the fact that I couldn't even find it in the HKMDB made me think it must be a real clunker. Then a friend who is writing up an essay on HK female action films made mention of this little obscurity a few times and made it sound pretty good. So I watched it and am glad I did.

It's a solid action/drama that reminded me mood wise a bit of She Shoots Straight with a much smaller budget. In many ways it plays out like an average low budget cop yarn, but it has enough twists along the way to keep you interested and an outstanding performance from Maggie Siu. Maggie Siu is primarily a very popular TV star in Hong Kong and I have not seen her in much, but as the film slowly shifts to her character in the second half it takes on some real dramatic tension and intensity. She also has a few action scenes in which she looks just fine and I am looking forward to seeing the sequel to this one -- Murders Made to Order -- in which she plays an undercover assassin.

The story is driven by corruption, betrayals, guilt, murder and revenge -- and all in the name of love. Three friends -- Anthony Wong, Cheng and Maggie Siu -- go through police training together and initially work under Johnny Wang. Cheng and Maggie are orphans that grew up together and Cheng always expected they would marry. When he realizes that she loves Anthony, he goes off the straight and narrow and begins secretly working with a major triad figure, Eddie Ko. Cheng is one of the fastest rising cops in Hong Kong and is soon a top inspector. Meanwhile, Anthony has joined the Internal Corruption Bureau and Maggie is still working under Wang. The three of them are seemingly still the best friends, but this is soon to explode under a barrage of accusations and suspicions.

Anthony is given evidence that Wang may be accepting bribes, but as he digs deeper he keeps unknowingly getting closer to his friend Cheng. Maggie is being kept in the dark by Anthony and his actions make her begin to suspect that he is corrupt as well -- she turns to Cheng who still loves her and wants to protect her -- but he can't allow Anthony to get any closer to the truth. Eddie Ko then gives Cheng orders to silence Maggie permanently because she is damaging his businesses. The first hour of the film sets it all up -- with some action scenes interspersed -- and this leads to a terrific last thirty minutes that have a few surprising and nasty turns.

**Stone Age Warriors (Hong Kong, 1990: Stanley Tong)** - I sincerely hope that Nina Li and Elaine Lui received combat pay for performing in this amazing adventure film directed from Stanley Tong. The things Stanley put his two female stars through in the jungles of New Guinea boggles the mind. This film is like The Perils of Pauline on speed. Headhunters, snakes, scorpions, Komodo Dragons, raging waterfalls and numerous killers all pose constant threats to the two women.

In the opening scene a group of treasure hunters are searching through the jungles of New Guinea when a tribe of natives sets upon them. In a brutal, violent and gory fight it appears that all of the party are massacred.

Switch back to HK where Nina Li is getting lambasted by her boss for giving the head of the party – Tanaka – a life insurance policy. I don't know too many insurance agents that would go into the deepest jungles to make sure their client is really dead, but Nina does. First though she stops off in Japan and teams up with Elaine Lui who is the daughter of Tanaka.

Off they merrily go to see if they can locate Tanaka. Nina Li in her fashionable red hat cuts quite a sight among the natives and fauna. Before too long they literally find themselves in the middle of a tribal war, but they are saved by Fan Siu-Wong – the guy from the *Story of Ricky*. He does some astonishing fighting in this film and I am perplexed as to why he has such a short filmography.

The film then goes into overdrive for the next forty-five minutes as the three of them survive one near death experience after another. It's a terrific roller coaster ride – full of action and thrills. Elaine Lui gets her share of great fight scenes while Nina Li acts more as a comic foil, but is also knee deep in the fun.

I've wanted to see this film for quite a while and it lived up to its reputation. In an interview, I recall Tong saying what a difficult shoot this was and I can certainly imagine why. He also said that for the most part it is the actresses doing their own stunts. If you watch this film, that fact will amaze you. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Story of Ricky (Hong Kong, 1992: Lam Nai-Choi) – aka Rikki-O - Rikki-O** - or, as seen here, *Riki-Oh* - has been a bit of a *cause celebre* in the world of the video bootleg for a while now. A lot of us received our first taste of this movie in Tom Weissner's *Asian Cult Cinema* magazine, in a short article that described the movie in all its visceral hyperbole. A couple of years later, I found a laserdisc pressing in a shop that rented HK discs - the laser had no English subtitles, but that didn't really seem to matter - *Story of Ricky* is the sort of movie where the dialogue is almost superfluous. I missed the subtle nuance here and there, but.... wait. Did I just say 'subtle'? Come now! This is *Story of Ricky* we're talking about here!

If you don't already know, *Story of Ricky* is a Hong Kong-Japanese co-production, based on a hyper-violent *manga* of the same name. Those of you familiar with comics like *Fist of the North Star* and *Violence Jack* have an idea of what I mean by *hyper-violence*; the *autuers* of these strips have an astoundingly grotesque imagination when it comes to creative, explosive means of death. It's a story structure we seen before in these pages, in the [Daimajin](#) movies: Bad guys get to do *really* bad guy things, then die a *hideous* death.

First, we see a bit of text onscreen informing us that it is the far-flung year 2000, and all prisons have been privatized (In fact, in the Tokyo Shock tape I'm reviewing, we get told this *twice*, at the very beginning). Into such a prison comes our hero, Ricky, a man who is still carrying around five bullets in his chest!

As we all know, anything run by Big Business becomes irretrievably corrupt, and this prison is no exception. Guards are largely absent - what order there is inside being kept by four murderous convicts called the Gang of Four, with each running a separate wing of the prison. Our first inkling of what it's like on the inside occurs when Wildcat\*, a major bully with an entourage of two, smashes the wooden toy locomotive a white collar criminal was making for his son. The salaryman tries to jump Wildcat with a wood lathe, but instead winds up with a strip lathed from his nose (*ouch!*). Chuckling, Wildcat saunters away... only to have Ricky trip him, so he does a header, face down, on the exposed nails of the smashed engine (*OUCH!*).

This would be excruciating viewing were the shot of Wildcat's head impaling itself upon the bed of nails not such an obvious dummy - that, and we are led to believe that Wildcat quite naturally put up his hand to ward off the nails... and so winds up with his hand nailed to his face for the remainder of the scene!

Vowing revenge, Wildcat enlists the aid of 400 pound homicidal maniac Elephant, whose job it is to kill Ricky and then eat him. Ricky responds to this by *punching through* Elephant (that is *some* kung fu!), causing the fat felon to take a slow motion fall, guts spilling from his abdomen and blood flying everywhere (again, in slow motion... odd how his wound here looks *nothing* like the wound Ricky inflicted in the close-up...). Ricky then takes a spike through the hand from Wildcat (without blinking), and, for an encore, *punches through* Wildcat. This eventually brings Ricky into conflict with Gang of Four member Oscar, who slashes Ricky's arm badly during their fight. Ricky responds by digging into his wrecked arm, knotting the sinews back together, and then proceeding to beat the hell out of Oscar. The bad guy, not about to be outdone, commits hara-kiri, hauling out his own intestines to strangle Ricky!

Wait, there's more! Ricky throws Oscar into the air, and when he deals Oscar the fatal blow, we get to see it in X-Ray (thank you, *Streetfighter!*)! Emboldened by Ricky's victory, the inmates descend on the evil Assistant Warden (who has a claw for one hand and a glass eye that dispenses mints), only to have the rest of the Gang of Four show up to deal out some serious hurtin'.

Here is where what is perceived as *Story of Ricky*'s major selling point: if you watched Comedy Central's *The Daily Show* in the Craig Kilborn days, the host would always close his celebrity interview with a segment called "Five Questions", which was introduced by a scene of a huge man making a mannequin's head explode betwixt his clapping hands. That scene is from *Story of Ricky*, and it is Gangster of Four Taizan's way of stopping the convicts cold (it is a rather hard act to follow). The other Gangsters include a New Wave guy who throws knitting needles attached to elastic bands, and what is supposed to be a *manga* pretty boy, effeminate but deadly. They're not fooling anyone - that's Yukari Oshima with a short hair cut! (I'd recognize those luscious hips anywhere...)

Ahem. Where was I? Oh, yes. Ricky's kung fu. Damn, he's good! But that's not all - Ricky also has superhuman strength. We are informed of this during a flashback when Ricky's uncle asks him, "So, Ricky... do you still have superhuman strength?" Ricky is serving time for the first time he used his skills in anger, killing the drug dealer responsible for the death of his girlfriend. So it is small wonder that, when Ricky discovers that the entire west wing of the prison is being used to grow opium poppies, he goes nutzoid again and burns the entire crop.

Now *all* the bad guys are pissed at Ricky, including the recently returned Warden, who packs a gun which, for some reason, makes people blow up like balloons and explode. And oh, yeah, he knows Ricky's form of kung fu, too. Only when *he* uses it, he grows into a seven foot tall monster, with a real mucus problem.

You may think I've told you a lot of what goes on in *Ricky*. I assure you, I have not - just when you think this movie has run out of ways to do violence to the human form, it surprises you all over again. Yet it somehow, oddly, manages to avoid being totally mean-spirited; unlike the catalog of atrocities in say, your average Italian chunk-blower, the stuff on display in *Ricky* is more like the exuberant grossness of a 13 year-old who has been drawing his own comic books and suddenly discovers the magic of a red marker. A friend, unable to see past the gore, once remarked that Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* looked like what would happen if a young boy were given a movie camera and a budget; he was wrong - *Story of Ricky* is that movie. This gleeful gratuity totally befits the movie's comic book origins - Ricky will be battered, cut, torn and bleeding from a fight in one scene, and appear miraculously whole and unscarred in the very next scene. He even *regenerates* like Wile E. Coyote.

Although I wouldn't classify *Story of Ricky* as a comedy, the movies it immediately invokes as comrades are gore comedies, like *Evil Dead II* and *Bad Taste*. The gore comedy is fiendishly hard to pull off - there is a reason that only Raimi and Jackson's names fly to mind when one contemplates masters of this subgenre. Those pictures share *Ricky*'s enthusiasm for showing What's On The Inside Suddenly Coming Outside - which is why I must post a particular *caveat* for this picture.

About ten years ago, when I was working full-time at a local theater (stage, not movie), a group of us would, every Sunday, scrape the children's show makeup off and head to my house to watch movies (the idea being it was somebody's turn to entertain *us*). After several weeks of programming such odd and well-received fare as *Straight to Hell* and Diane Keaton's *Heaven*, I tried to slip in *Bad Taste* - and was commanded, after the first ten minutes, to turn the movie off. By every female in the room.

It is a rare woman, it seems, who can look past the horror on the screen, to see the latex and colored syrup, and appreciate the audacity of what the filmmakers are parading across the screen. And that's *okay* - if we were *all* warped, Julia Roberts and Richard Gere would starve. But I learned a powerful lesson on that day: *maybe my sense of humor is a shade too refined*.

Several years later, I was asked by a friend (the sort of friend who asks really *good* questions), as he looked about my apartment ... at the horror movie stuff, the extensive library of Warner Brothers Cartoons, the comic books and music encompassing all genres... he asked, "What is the unifying theme here? What is it about all this that you like?" I thought for a moment and then answered, "I like the absurd. And when you get right down to it, there is nothing more absurd than a horror movie."

This is a fine distinction, this razor's edge difference between *absurd* and *horrifying*. Daffy Duck getting shot in the head any number of times and suffering only Beak Dislocation is absurd; so is a man punching his way through another man. If there was anything in the least realistic about the goings-on in *Ricky*, it would be unwatchable drek; as it is, even the plausible incidents in the movie - and there aren't many - are rendered in such an over-the-top manner that one expects Jon Lovitz' Master Thespian to step out from behind a column and shout, "Acting!" In

badly-synced sound, of course. The Tokyo Shock version has provided the one thing I was missing from my *Ricky* experience- typically bad dubbing, allowing it to finally keep company, in my mind, with my beloved Shaw Brothers movies from the 70's.

The upshot of all this? *Story of Ricky* comes highly recommended, but use as directed. Display at beer-swilling Guy Meetings. Do *not* expect to pop it in on a quiet evening on the couch and have your lady love appreciate it's gooeey wonders over a glass of Chablis.

Ah, but if she does, gentlemen - that's *amore*, which is Italian for, *that rules*. (by Freeman Williams)

**Story of the Gun (Hong Kong, 1992: Tang Pei Tung) – aka Guns of the Master Killer** - The film opens with a robbery at a jewelry store that doesn't seem to connect to the plot at all. It is a pretty average shooting scene. We then are introduced to Gordon Liu (who is a cop in HK) and his family. There is some weird joke about his kid lying on his genitals when they take a bath together, and we learn that his wife has passed. Gordon Liu is sent to the mainland to investigate some curious shipments between China and HK. We then meet our villains, Oshima Yukari is a police chiefs daughter but is in league with the criminals and seems to have a one way relationship with the crime boss(Lee Man-Tai). The bosses right hand man (Mark Cheng) seems to have a fling with Yukari, and they are attempting to somehow overtake one of the bosses shipments and run away together.. Yeah, clearly if they can get away with such a thing our crime boss is pretty incompetent. Anyway while we learn about our little crime family, the film shows Gordon Liu building a romance with a woman in China, and sadly that's probably the more interesting part of the story. The two plots feel very disconnected from one another and don't connect til late in the movie, and it feels pretty cheap.

As you can see, the plot is honestly pretty bad, but the abandoned subplots keep it interesting through one viewing. Oshima Yukari's character starts off with some mystery, and it seems as if maybe she has been abducted, or is working under cover. Sadly, any mystery surrounding that is quickly killed and we learn that she is having an affair with Mark Cheng, in a much less interesting plot(imo). Gordon Liu sports an absolutely ridiculous perm wig (I think!), and is pretty charming in his interactions with his girlfriend and son, making those parts somewhat interesting. The plot mainly focuses on Oshima Yukari and Mark Cheng, and they're both scumbags and arguably worse than their boss they're trying to screw over, making it hard to care about their story. When the two plots finally converge, some admittedly generic and expected things happen to give the story a sense of urgency, and we get a lot more action. The acting is honestly pretty bad, and the Shaw actors are the best in that department, which is bad because only one of them has any substantial amount of screen time.

The action in the film is honestly pretty good and plenty entertaining. With that said, it isn't necessarily anything we haven't seen before either. I believe this is the first I have seen of Yukari Oshima and I have to say I was very impressed. She is a very good screen fighter and an amazing kicker. She has a nice chick fight with Gordons cop partner in Sophia Crawford. Mark Cheng was solid in the fights as well. Gordon Liu was our only Shaw star to do any fighting, and his fights were very basic but he still showed plenty of energy. The shooting scenes were pretty average, and there was some entertaining foot-chasing mixed into the action on at least two occasions. The action came just frequently enough that the story didn't grate me too much.

Onto our Shaw veterans! I already covered about as much as necessary about Gordon Liu. Whether due to bias or any real reason, he was definitely my favorite part of the film. Tin Cheng played an "Uncle" character to the crime family, and was a "wise-advisor" to Yukari and Mark Cheng. Honestly, I felt like Tin Cheng played a similar character to what he did in most Shaw films; A smooth talking guy with plenty of charm, that cant help but annoy the sh\*\* out of me! Lo Lih is the "big boss" of the mob that Yukari's boss has to answer to. He does a good job at this as is expected, but only gets about 10 minutes of screen time. I have to assume he played a similar role in other films of the time, and would love to see him get more time with this kind of character. Actually, now that I think of it, its similar to his role in *Dragons Forever*; But it takes him a little longer to get KO'd in this! Lol!

*Story of the Gun* is an average film. The plot is barely interesting watching it initially due to wasted subplots and Gordon Liu's character. Thankfully, the action is frequent and Yukari Oshima is a beast, so over all the film still manages to be plenty entertaining. The cameos from our other Shaw stars are a nice touch, and they do a good job with what they had to work with. It is one of those cases where I can't recommend it because there are too many great movies, but it isn't "bad" at all in my mind. As far as I know this was my intro to Yukari Oshima and I will be looking forward to seeing more. (by Paimeifist of KFF)

**Street of Fury (Hong Kong, 1996: Billy Tang)** - Until Teresa Mak Ga-Kei shows up at about the 48 minute mark, "Street of Fury" is by-the-numbers young gangsters on the way up flick, produced in the wake of the hugely popular "Young and Dangerous" from earlier in 1996. The thrown together combination of young stars on their way up (Louis Koo Tin-Lok as the callow Lung), seasoned genre artists hamming it up (Elvis Tsui Kam-Kong having his usual twitchy good time as Chuen Wong, the King) and old pros phoning in their stock roles (Liu Fan and Wong Yat-Fei as the aunt and uncle) together with unexciting action choreography and cardboard thin characters makes it look like just another dreary Triad film.

The two main male characters are introduced right away with backgrounds filled in quickly. Foo lives in a housing project with his loutish aunt and uncle who play endless games of mahjong with their friends and complains that Foo isn't enough like his brother, Lung. We find out that Foo has been fired from a couple of jobs and thrown out of school for fighting—clearly a tough guy or at least an anti-social guy. Lung works at a garage. He is propositioned by the girlfriend of his boss--the boss walks in and attacks Lung who knocks him unconscious, slapping the girlfriend on the way out. The two of them play soccer in game that pits their team against another bunch of toughs from the neighborhood. The leader of the opposing team has bet \$HK1000 on the game which he loses, departing with bad grace. After the game Lung sends Yee, his girlfriend who is played by Gigi Lai Chi to pick up more beer. She is threatened and molested by Fatty, the leader of the guys they just beat, with Foo, Lung and their friends showing up just in time.

Fatty is protected by low-level Triad "Short-sighted" (Simon Loui Yu-Yeung in a performance with even more eye rolling, grimacing and maniacal grinning than this actor usually delivers) a thug who oozes corruption and filth. Faced with a choice of recruitment by Short-sighted or a fatal beating, they get away in a very lame scene in which one of our heroes gets the drop on Short-sighted and escapes by holding a fork to his to his throat.

By this point there is no reason to continue watching "Street of Fury"--but then Teresa Mak sashays into a gang clubhouse and we are riveted. She is playing Shan who is sexy, a bit scatter-brained, tough as can be and completely self confident. The contrast between Mak and the rest of the cast is startling, something like Constantin Stanislavski dropping to take a supporting role at a community theater. Shan doesn't seem to be written with any more depth or truth than any of the other characters but Mak grabs hold of what is there and becomes the center of the movie from that point on, even when she is not on screen. When the scene switches to a mobster who is looking for Shan and who tasks Short-sighted to find her we realize that there is finally a character that we care about, someone whose fate interests us

There is a lot wrong with "Street of Fury". It is derivative and worse than the movie it was based on; Yee could be used as a template for how not to write for a female character; the fight choreography and cinematography is beyond bad. The only reason to watch it is the electrifying star turn by Teresa Mak and in this case that is enough. Starting at the 48 minute mark I would recommend it highly. Watching from the beginning gets a lukewarm recommendation. (by Ewaffle of HKMDB)

**Sunshine Cops (Hong Kong, 1999: Liu Kim-Wa)** - For some Hong Kong film fans, 2002 was the year of "Infernal Affairs" while others might remember it better as the year of the Twins. A case might also be made for the year's key development involving Karena Lam and Angelica Lee -- two singers turned actresses who appear to possess genuine dramatic abilities as well as real promise -- bursting onto the Hong Kong movie scene. Only, doing this entails, among other things, one's discounting it being so that the former's first film is technically a 2001 release (as a result of Ann Hui's "July Rhapsody" having had its local premiere in late December of that year), and the latter actually having made her not very heralded cinematic debut back in 1999 in a Golden Harvest production which accorded its two titular male characters much more of the limelight than its under-utilized main female.

The Raymond Chow presented SUNSHINE COPS begins with two young men -- one in beat police attire and another who turns out to be a plainclothes policeman -- seeking to prevent a suicide attempt and managing to do this in a rather unorthodox manner. Soon afterwards, the straight arrow Sammy (who is essayed by Ken Chong) and more laidback H2O (Stephen Fung's character's nickname is derived from the initials of his real name of Heung Hoi On) find themselves participating in an official but unconventional series of tests that: involves a round of aerobics (!) along with unarmed combat (during which they -- and the often enjoyably stylish looking offering's action director (Ma Yuk Sheung), cinematographer (Choi Sung Fai) and editor (Cheung Kai Fai) -- show off their considerable, visually pleasing, abilities) and target shooting; and is geared towards sorting through the "Best of the Best" to find two professionally able -- but also photogenic plus not graceless -- individuals to help present "a new image for the new millennium" of the Hong Kong Police Force to the public.

As expected, Sammy and H2O it is who get picked by the selection panel of senior police personnel to be the HKPF's first pair of SUNSHINE COPS. As explained and outlined by their new commanding officer (Superintendent Margarita So is played by Eileen Tung), this duo's mission involves their becoming "ideal policemen" who will be looked upon as new idols by -- as well as role models for -- the younger generation; with the idea being that, should these "Gen X" types be successful in carrying out this experimental assignment, they will revamp the police force's image, draw a larger number of new recruits and "stop crimes before they happen". Like H2O noted (and this movie's makers seemed to want to emphasize), this image fashioning process appeared to parallel that which is utilized by the entertainment industry to create new idols or that which beauty pageant participants undergo as a matter of course.

Rather understandably, this kind of activity -- which involves grown men being told how to dress, have their hair cut, strut, pose for photographs, etc. -- is not one that everyone will take to all that happily. Although H2O seems unbothered by it all, even before their fraudulent plus stage-managed participation in an SDU operation, Sammy -- who comes from a family of achieving police officers (who include an SDU officer elder brother portrayed by Ken Wong and a sister with two pips on each of her shoulders played by Astrid Chan) -- had already felt some unease at being used in this kind of Public Relations rather than more conventional law enforcing role. However, all seemed to be well for a time after the SUNSHINE COPS looked to have genuinely gained some respect from everyone concerned (including their fellow officers and families along with the general public) by succeeding in saving a pre-school class and their teacher of the threat that was posed by a weapon wielding mad man who had entered their class-room and effectively held that group hostage until the duo's impressive intervention.

Despite her not having set out to truly upset the SUNSHINE COPS' apple cart, Angelica Lee's character's entrance into their lives sparks off a train of events that will result in such as a smear campaign being waged against them by a paparazzi chief and their also incurring the ire of the head of a kidnapping gang (portrayed by Andrew Lin). On the bright side, Katy Lam is winning enough for both Sammy as well as H2O to be charmed by her. Even more happily for this often brainless plus immature feeling work's audience is the fact that those of its heroes' troubles that can be traced to their cultivating this schoolgirl's company are ones that they seek to resolve by way of unleashing an often seriously cool looking series of kicks, punches and similarly acts of violence against (criminal) others!

To be sure, the action style favored in SUNSHINE COPS will not be everyone's cup of tea (E.g., I can hear criticisms of it being insufficiently gritty and patently unrealistic). Still, this (re)viewer has few qualms stating that she found herself being more entertained by the fight scenes in this not particularly heralded effort -- plus reckons that they are collectively more exciting -- than, say, those made up the action portions of "Romeo Must Die" and "Shanghai Knights". On the one hand, it's true enough that this may not be saying much at all. On the other, I honestly didn't think that a day would come (and so soon!) when I would find myself preferring the combustible sections of a movie for which the pretty boy-ish Stephen Fung was a leading man -- never mind one in which I thought that he was overshadowed by a less big name actor (in Ken Chong) -- over any that starred Jet Li or Jackie Chan. (by YTSL of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Super Cops (Taiwan, 1997: Mao Chiang-Pang)** - A brother and sister travel to Zhuhai in Mainland China to search for employment with an uncle. They experience a number of mishaps and conflicts. In a separate plot thread Yukari plays a Tokyo Interpol agent sent to assist the local police, led by Cynthia Yang (Khan) and Waise Lee, arrest a drug smuggler (Billy Chow). Much of the movie is filler time spent on antics associated with the uncle and his restaurant, or on the activities of the smugglers. Nevertheless, Yukari plays her small role with considerable restraint and subtlety. Since she only speaks a few words during the entire movie, she acts more with facial expression and body language. The gang members eventually pick a fight with the restaurateur. For the most part the action is implausible, lacking any dramatic tension. It is not clear how Yukari and Cynthia Khan were invited to the drug smuggler's birthday celebration. The final fight sequence (at the birthday party) is somewhat better than the rest of the movie. Yukari remains impressively athletic and eventually triumphs, although Khan's role peters out. Yukari's still worth watching, even if the rest of the movie is not. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Super Lady Cop (Hong Kong, 1992: Wellson Chin)** - This oddity from Golden Harvest is essentially a cross between *Black Mask* and *City Hunter*, although it predates both those films. I'm guessing it was churned out while *City Hunter* was still in production, because this film also has a *Street Fighter 2* sequence. The idea is that Mainland China is making super soldiers via experiments in acupuncture, and the first three subjects (including Yuen Wah and superkicker Chui Ying-Jat, who looks like the love child of Leslie Cheung and Ken Lo) go AWOL. The fourth subject, a superhuman policewoman named Nancy (Cynthia Khan), sneaks into Hong Kong to bring the three back. Meanwhile, the three super soldiers have become dangerous criminals, and a team of cops, including Alex Man, are

on their tales. Nancy has some dust-ups with both the criminals and the cops, and eventually gets amnesia. She's taken in by Alex Man and Athena Chu, who plays a teenaged prostitute that's throwing herself on Man's penis (to his credit, he ignores her advances). Nancy eventually gets her memory back and takes on the bad guys.

The action takes a backseat to the comedy, which is understandable, as Wellson Chin of *Inspector Wears Skirts* fame directed this. The comedy consists of Alex Man trying to ignore jailbait Athena Chu's flirting, Alex trying to flirt with Cynthia Khan, one of the super soldiers slowly becoming a transsexual, Alex putting up with sexual harassment from his female boss, and blackly comic scene involving said boss getting shot to death. There's also some surrealism in the end, when the heroes end up at the laboratory of the scientist who created them, and you have a Muppet Baby-esque sequence of them opening doors that lead to stock footage of God-knows-where. And remember that scene in *City Hunter* where Ryu Saeba is so hungry he imagines Chingmy Yau's body as being food? This film one-up's that and we get to see a beautiful woman get her face chewed off by someone who mistakes her for a roast chicken!

The fight sequences were choreographed by Alan Chui, best known for his work on *Shaolin Temple Against Lama* and *Rebellious Reign*. Sadly, his 90s efforts are a far cry from his old school movies, this one included. There is a lot of wire-work here, and it's all awkward and badly-handled; I would've thought that working with Ching Siu-Tung in the 80s would've improved his game more. Cynthia Khan, Yuen Wah and Chui Ying-Jat all have the moves, but there's a lot of silliness that gets in the way. The best scene is the *Street Fighter 2* bit at the end, where Cynthia becomes Chun Li and Chui Ying-Jat becomes Guile. It's not quite as authentic, move-wise, as *City Hunter*, but Khan looks beautiful in the outfit and does some nice kicks. But it hardly justifies the rest of the film.

**Super Mischieves (Taiwan, 1995: Kevin Chu Yen-Ping)** - Begins promisingly as we see pudgy little Kok Siu-Man, the most irritating actor alive, having his head banged into a bell at Messy Temple. Yes, it's the continued, frequently bizarre, and always incoherent adventures of secluded monks (toddler Kok Siu-Man, his straight-arrow little pal Sik Siu-Lung, and incompetent supervising monk Ng Man-Tat). A pretty local girl has insinuated herself into their lives with the secret goal of stealing the powerful Yi-Gin Sutra from their library. Once it's taken, our three monks head for HK in pursuit, where they meet Gum, a Chinese Forrest Gump who leads them to a haunted house, where they find ghosts, evil flying fairies, and a hopping vampire; and once at their destination, Devil's Temple, poor little Sik Siu-Lung has to do most of the work dispensing with parodies of characters from recent HK hits, including the transformed girl who stole the sutra (who now resembles Brigitte Lin from *The Bride with White Hair*, with some *Swordsmen 2* mixed in), some guy who looks like The Mad Monk, a Wong Fei-Hong/Fong-Sai Yuk amalgam, and... Well, the parody element goes overboard on this one, and the moments of "ah, yes!" recognition greatly exceed those of actual amusement. Still, the best action sequences are so totally over-the-top you're left speechless. Needless to say, there's tons of farting jokes -- the moral core of all Kok Siu-Man films. (by Steven Spinalli of HKMDB)

**Supercop.com (Hong Kong, 2000: Philip Ko Fei)** - "Supercop.com" is an ineptly made, stupefyingly boring movie that concludes with ten minutes of exciting, brutal and convincing action. It follows four recruits through training for an elite South Korean police unit, the S. D. U., which seems to be a paramilitary unit of the uniformed branch that specializes in rappelling down the sides of buildings, hanging from helicopter skids and using jet skis to pursue fleeing bad guys. While doing all this and more they keep their neckties tight and their top buttons buttoned -- obviously a very spit and polish crew.

Madame Cheung is the implacably tough drill sergeant who takes the kids through their paces. She is as slim as a knife blade, mean as a snake and able to run any of her younger charges into the ground. The four recruits are led by Cynthia Khan, gorgeous as usual and, for a change, costumed to take advantage of her looks. Most filmmakers seem to think that boxy jackets and poorly fitting slacks are the right look for her but this is one of the few details that Phillip Ko and his crew got right.

One would expect the young policewomen to develop and change under the stress of training—that we would find out enough about them to identify with them, share in their triumphs and agonize in their defeats. They would be types, of course—the tough city kid, the brain, the offspring of a police family—and at least one would have a hidden motive for wanting to join this elite unit. The audience responds to the characters and psychically invests in their successes and failures. It has worked in countless movies, such as "Top Gun", "An Officer and a Gentleman" and "The Fighting 69th" are examples although life most of the rest they involve men undergoing military training. The problem with "Supercop.com" is that we don't learn anything about the characters—other than KK, whose father is a retired cop—we don't know anyone's fears, hopes or dreams. The four of them are just there.

Instead of developing the characters, Phillip Ko, who both wrote and directed, filled time—a LOT of time—with shots of extremely dull activity. I felt as tired of watching the recruits run as they must have been themselves. The obstacle course—which looked like it had been put together from cast-off primary school recess equipment—was shown from every angle possible. Cynthia Khan did look quite fetching doing one arm chin-ups, though. The worst was saved for after the training had been completed. Squads of graduating policewomen marched past a Korean police band. At first it was mildly interesting—the marchers carried a briefcase in their left hands and swung their right, in cadence. By the time the third squad marched by it was no longer interesting and when the nth squad had finally made it past it seemed that this graduating class had enough womanpower to repel a North Korean invasion while keeping the traffic moving in Seoul. Ko could have used stock footage of a Moscow May Day parade to better effect. The medal ceremony at the graduation also dragged and dragged. All of this could have been done—and has been done a lot—much more effectively with a few well placed shots of smiling or weeping faces, some montage and a couple of establishing shots. One hesitates to say that the excruciatingly protracted scenes were artistic decisions—it was as if he forgot to edit these scenes and just used whatever he had shot.

A secondary and almost unrelated plot brought in Anthony Wong and Angela Tong who head a Hong Kong police unit on the trail of counterfeiters operating through South Korea, the SAR and the Mainland. Angela Tong is, as usual, quite fetching and Anthony Wong delivers a professional if not particularly rousing performance. The two plots don't ever intersect.

The chase and fight at the end of the movie, while excellent, isn't really worth sitting through the first 85 minutes for. It involves the four recruits, now police officers, chasing Ken Lo who is the hitman for the counterfeiting ring and Cynthia Khan's ex-fiancé. The villains escape on a speedboat and the policewomen pursue on jet skis, with Madame Cheung appearing like a *deus ex machina* in a helicopter. The girls are armed with handguns while the boys have firepower to spare. Their boat crashes in flames everyone winds up in a warehouse stalking each other. Here the action is plentiful and compelling. Essentially everyone fires at everyone else until he or she runs out of ammunition after which beat the hell out of each other. Surprisingly, Cynthia Khan isn't featured here—all of the women (or their doubles) are terrific kickers and tough fighters with Madame Cheung reigning supreme. She shoots two of the bad guys and knocks two more of them out—the counterfeiting gang picked up some reinforcements when we weren't looking because each of the policewomen dispatch at least one of them.

Not recommended, although I give it one point for the fights at the end. (by Ewaffle of HKMDB)

**Superfights (USA, 1995: Tony Leung Siu-Hung)** - Jack Cody (BG) is a young man who is a big fan of Superfights, a sports entertainment venue which is a mix of professional wrestling and martial arts. When he becomes a local hero, he gets an offer to join the Superfight organization run by Robert Sawyer (KV). But Sawyer is a corrupt businessman who uses his fighters to strong-arm his way into the criminal enterprises of the city. Ultimately, Cody learns of this and also that Sawyer is a Superfighter in his own right.

Opening Credits - This is a mash-up of different fighters in the ring. There's a lot of good choreography on display here in snippets of different bouts.

Fight #1 --- Cody's training session - BG showcases his skills here in a back storage room that he's rigged with props and dummies using ropes and pulleys. He displays his martial talent quite well. There's lots of good kicks and it's fun to watch. (Come on, what teenage boy didn't engage in stuff like this to some extent? Probably not to this degree though.)

Fight #2 --- Cody vs 3 gang members - It's a good fight with some comedic attempts. Still, the choreography isn't bad.

Fight #3 --- Cody vs Sally's grandfather - This is short but very cool. Grandfather dips Cody's hands in flour and then challenges the young man to simply try to touch him. There's some good wushu on display here as well as BG's agility. (The old man is obviously doubled but the end credits don't list who did it.)

Fight #4 --- Cody's training/sparring - Now inducted into the Superfight organization, Cody undergoes training. This is sort of cool. The training room is supposed to be hi-tech but it's kind of campy. Still fun to watch though. It culminates in Cody and Angel (KG) engaging in a sparring match. She's a bodybuilder type but not overly so in a way that ruins her femininity. The choreography is fast and smooth and full of good exchanges.



Fight #5 --- Cody vs The Enforcer (and others) - This is his 1st Superfight. It's pretty good. The choreography is fast, almost too fast at times, and not due to under-cranking. These guys are going all out. Some of the blows don't look like they connect or that the extension is full in places but it still works. (Then what follows is a montage of Cody's various other fights which are meh.)

Fight #6 --- Cody vs Masked Man - He gets assaulted while out jogging. This is a short fight but with some good combo's.

Fight #7 - Superfighters Darkcloud (CJ), Budokai (CL), and Nightstalker (BR) jack up a gang beneath an overpass. It's brutal in places but there's some good force shown in the brawl.

At this point Cody starts training in Tai Chi with Sally and her grandfather.

Fight #8 --- Cody vs Nightstalker - It's a snippet of the end of a Superfight match but shows Cody employing a bit of the Tai Chi he's learned. Ends with a good kick.

Fight #9 - More gang-busting by Darkcloud, Budokai, and Nightstalker. It's very short but very cool.

Fight #10 --- Sawyer vs 3 goons - Finally, KV gets to strut his stuff and it's fun to watch! There's great speed and dexterity in his kicks and he uses a pair of rings, 1 worn on each hand. Each ring has a little talon extending from it which he uses to strike at vital points.

Fight #11 --- Cody vs Darkcloud (CJ) - Good fight! I love to watch CJ. He's a very talented MA and a great kicker. I wish this would've been a little longer. There's quite a few good kick combo's here.

Fight #12 - Cody goes along with the other 3 Superfighters to shakedown the owner of a Chinese restaurant. Of course, they beat up a bunch of waiters.....but there's some good hits here.

Fight #13 --- Cody vs Masked Man again - This time he's attacked in his apartment. Very short fight but there's good kicking.

End Fight --- Cody vs Sawyer - This starts off in a chain-link fenced cage which is equipped with a pendulum wrapped in barbed wire. KV is amazing with his feet! There are fantastic kick combo's all over the place!

The fight moves outside the cage into the warehouse where Cody takes on Darkcloud and Nightstalker with pieces of pipe. These are short skirmishes but they're very good!

Then Sawyer is at him again, this time employing his taloned rings. Great choreography here! The hits are hard and the kicks are fast! KV just dazzles with his feet! It just blows my mind how much of a versatile boot-man he is! Then Cody goes into Tai Chi mode and starts delivering the beatdown. Best fight of the film with a bloody ending!!!!

This movie is a trip....on a number of levels. The acting is cringe-inducing but not insufferable. The wardrobe and props harken back to the 80's. It cracks me up. Cody is billed as the All-American Hero Superfighter and is dressed in flamboyantly patriotic garb.

What saves it is the topnotch MA talent. Gaines is a good MA who could've gone on to do more films imo but never has to my knowledge. *Vitali is just phenomenal! And he makes for a good villain who is smooth and confident not only as a businessman but as a fighter. Jeffreys steals every scene he's in. How has this guy not blown up in action films? (You know what I mean.) He's a really good actor (reminds me of Eddie Murphy in his delivery) and just great in his fight sequences!*

Best of all, it seems there's a fight every 10 minutes or so! This is a throwback to the HK fight action I love so dearly and I don't think it disappoints at all!!! GET THIS!!!!!!!!!!!! (by Scott Blasingame)

**Tale of Rascal, A (Taiwan, 1999: Kevin Chu Yen-Ping)** - BIG-Mandarin circuit seems to be running out of movie. While 'My Heart Will Go On' is showing, they had not put up the next change movie. Now with the poor box office of 'My Heart Will Go On', they put up 'A Tale of Rascal' to wait for Hong Kong movie 'Bullets Over Summer', which will open on 5 August 1999.

'A Tale of Rascal' is a Taiwan production by CHU Yin-ping. This time it is directed to CHEUNG Kwok-lap casting NG Kei-lung and TSUI Yuk-uen. Mou (NG Kei-lung) is a homeless teenager. One day a little girl sticks to him. Mou accidentally fought with a group of guys who are filming movies. He became one of the replacements in the movie and meet actress Gigi TSUI (TSUI Yuk-suen). With Gigi's help, Mou has the chance to go back to school on agreement that he can be the Top 5 in the class. However, it is a hard job for Mou who hates lessons. He takes the short cut by dating the principal's daughter Icy and cheating in the examination. He was at the top of the class and got the love from Gigi but his plan has been unveiled by Icy. Then Mou falls to a life where his daily life is just the duplication of his yesterday...

Frankly speaking, it may be hard for Hong Kong audience to tolerate the stuffs in 'A Tale of Rascal'. The main problem of the movie is the plot. The plot is something without much focus. Maybe the main theme of the movie is about the love between Mou and Gigi and the love between the little girl and Mou. However, poor linkage of the movie resulted in the failure to fulfill such function. It is very strange to see the little girl laughs from time to time in the movie without reasons which is so annoying.

The first ten minutes about how Mou thought to eat in a restaurant without paying money is totally redundant. Then the first touch between Gigi and Mou is okay. However, the switch for Mou going back to school is non-sense. At least I think there should be some descriptions about the bad guys in the school like 'Two Weird Power'. Now they only film the scene in a classroom for a single lesson. I consider they can make the movie entertaining if they would like to put efforts in presenting how Mou behaves in schools. The dating between Mou and Icy is also too smooth and the scenes taken are not critical. It is also strange that you cannot find the progress of love between Gigi and Mou during Mou's days in schools.

The second half of the movie is something weird. The playing of repeating daily lives of Mou just like a kind of copycat from Hollywood movie. However, I cannot see any reason for them to repeat 5 times, around 6 to 8 minutes per time without much stuffs in. At least I think if they would like to play such repeating trick, they can copy a bit from Jim Carrey's 'The Truman Show' also. Now it is very boring, if you play this movie at home and you can fast forward these scenes. The ending of the movie is also weird. I cannot see the reasons for NG Kei-lung to change and there is no process for NG to change his relationship with others. It is so weird!

In short, the whole movie has got a poor script. The first ten minutes is redundant while the second half of the movie is just a duplication from other movies without any input. Together with the annoying pointless laughs from the little girl over the movie, there are enough reasons for you to tell how worse 'A Tale of Rascal' can be. (by Ryan of HKMDB)

**Tapang sa Tapang (Philippines, 1997: Francis Posadas)** - Director Francis Posadas tries hard, but the whole is less than the sum of its parts. Mr. Nakamoto is the Japanese owner of a Philippino toy company. He is informed that his business is being used as a cover for arms smuggling. On arrival in the Philippines he is murdered, and his daughter Jane (Yukari) arrives to attend the funeral and take over the company. Her character speaks in a mixture of English and Tagalog. A Philippino detective uncovers the smuggling operation, but Jane initially does not believe him until she examines the books. An attempt to kidnap her fails, and a contract killing is then ordered on her and the detective. They are betrayed by a corrupt police officer and must fight the gang directly.

Better than average action sequences, location filming, and good acting by Yukari are offset by an unnecessary romantic thread. Judging by the number of times she blinked, it wasn't easy for Yukari to kiss her male lead. However, Yukari does have adequate screen time and good fight sequences. Her final fight, although brief, is well up to her standards, with several impressive kicks. Earlier she performs a kip-up (remember, this is as recent as 1997), and there's even a short underwater scene! This movie provides ample confirmation of her enduring good form and high physical condition. Also, this is the only movie demonstration of Yukari using the Philippino fighting stick. It's worth watching for this alone. Incidentally, the "plain Jane" remark (Yukari, in English - "I don't go for formality. Just call me Jane. Just plain Jane") is unlikely to be accidental, since the term "plain Jane" has been used elsewhere in the Filmswell English dub of "Angel's Mission." (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Taste of Killing and Romance, A (Hong Kong, 1994: Veronica Chan)** - In many ways this is just your typical Hong Kong romance in which a man and woman meet cute - have an adverse relationship at first, but keep bumping into one another and soon find themselves falling in love. It even has the mandatory musical interlude (sung by Andy) in which the young couple wanders around the streets of Hong Kong hand in hand. Of course, there is a slight difference in this one - both Andy Lau and Anita Yuen are professional killers and very good ones at that. But killers

fall in love like anyone else and in fact very likely have more in common than most couples do. And the coming home after work conversation tends to be more interesting - "honey, did you use a razor to the jugular or a shot to the head today". Only in Hong Kong.

Love is never an easy road though and as you might imagine in the world of professional killers it gets even a bit more complicated than most. Andy is the legendary hitman Judge (though he only kills bad guys who deserve it of course) and Anita is more of a killer trainee (and turns her earnings over to charity!). In her first assignment she casually swishes into an office (attired in French cuffs and a spiffy hat) and after killing her target with a sharp object to the head, she pulls out a gun and starts blasting away at everything that moves. Anita looks good with a gun in her hand and in this film that counts for a lot. In her escape she carjacks Andy and has him drive her away. Even though it is a while before she realizes that he is the man she most admires - trainees need role models too - all seems set for a smooth sailing into the sunset until their contractors - a very nasty Mark Cheng (who pours poison down a little girl's throat and then stuffs her dog into the dryer) and a sexy but deadly Christine Ng - decide to silence them.

I have to say that I have heard very few if any good words spoken about this film, but I think it is a classic in its own messy, excessive way. It is wonderfully hokey and melodramatic in a manner that only Hong Kong films can achieve without making you feel like an idiot for watching it. But as corny as it is and predictable as it is, I still found myself very caught up in the story and even enjoying the nonsensical dialogue as well as the absurdity of the plot. It is quite stylish and the action is constant throughout the film (and choreographed by Stephen Tung - Pom Pom and Hot Hot). The cinematographer makes everyone look great - even after they are dead - and Andy goes into pure pop mode and Anita has a rare opportunity in her career to do heroic bloodshed and comes through very nicely. As it progresses it becomes more and more brutal - compliments of Mark Cheng - until the wonderful carnage ending catharsis. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**That's Money (Hong Kong, 1990: Wong Chung Yam)** - The presence of more costume fetishism and some outrageously graphic symbolism in this action comedy is better understood after recognizing that the Director, Benny Wong (aka Benny C. Y. Wong) is actually Simon Yun Ching. In this movie he appears to rehearse the symbolic devices he would later employ so successfully in "Dreaming The Reality" and "Angel Terminators II." The plot is incidental. A bumbling P.I. finds himself in possession of a large sum of drug money. He is hospitalized after a fight. His partner Max Mok, together with Yukari and Wai Ying-Hung (Clare Wai) fight off various attempts to retrieve it, without recognizing why they are being attacked. Eventually the gang kidnaps Yukari, holding her as a hostage to force return of the money.

During the first half of the film Yukari is demurely attired in '50s-style blouse, flowing skirt, cat's eyes spectacles and ponytail. She has several spectacular fights dressed like this, even wearing heels. When she poses with her entire leg exposed, before kicking a groveling bad guy, it's not clear whether his frantic nodding represents begging for mercy or for more pain. At various points Yukari is also briefly presented fawning over her unattractive out-of-shape male boss, emerging from the bathroom, rummaging in the back of a laden garbage truck - only to find pornography, being kidnapped and tied up, and tormented by rats and reptiles while being videotaped by a sadist. At the other extreme she (twice) accidentally kicks her boss/partner in the genitals during a fight causing permanent priapism, emerges from a bathroom attired as a butch - with a remarkable resemblance to her later character in "Dreaming" - then sexually assaults an unwanted female guest, and (together with Clare Wai) simply trashes the arrogant male opposition - kicking a guy through a glass door and squirting a tube of glue up another's nose. During the final fight she also spears one guy with a wooden stake. Uncharacteristic outtakes, as the final credits roll, show Yukari in command of the action, as well as exchanging pretty painful full-contact blows during the filming.

In other words, this film is all about power and control versus submission and humiliation. In the guise of an action comedy it superficially seems harmless enough, but the message still gets through. Can the symbolism be any clearer? These elements are exclusively associated with Yukari's character, indicating that the director clearly understood her potential to traverse both extremes. The camera leers and peers closely, intimately. We can observe beads of sweat, pimples, buck teeth, insect bites. Skirts fly. Yukari has five separate fight sequences, all excellent and some stellar. The action becomes progressively rougher, and the fetishistic elements are gradually stripped away. By the time the final fight scenes are played out, it's as good as any of Yukari's action. Few other women can deliver front punches with comparable power - complete with bloody knuckles. This movie clearly shows how she could serve as inspiration for women's boxing! As usual, Clare Wai is excellent, with some great fight sequences. The combination of these two in this production offers some of the best female kung-fu/karate action of the genre. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Theft Under the Sun (Hong Kong, 1997: Cha Chuen-Yee)** - Julian Cheung plays an undercover cop sent in to get an arms smuggler (Michael Wong). When the attempted arrest goes wrong, Cheung is put under investigation by the police force, including a psychiatrist played by Francis Ng (in a startlingly "normal" performance). Shunned by everyone except his girlfriend Gigi Lai, Cheung eventually hooks back up with Wong for a major arms deal. With a large stash of missiles heading for Hong Kong, the cops must decide if Cheung is still on their team or not.

Theft Under the Sun has a number of problems going for it -- a weak plot and script (Gigi Lai's character is totally unnecessary and only serves to annoy despite looking good in short skirts and hotpants), bad acting (pretty much a given in any movie featuring Michael "dead wood" Wong, who seems to be trying to legitimize himself by adding the laughable "Fitzgerald" to his name), really bad computer effects (your average art student could probably come up with better stuff than this), and an ending so contrived and sugary sweet (not to mention wholly implausible), it would fit in better with your average '80s US low-budget action flick rather than a relatively high-budget Hong Kong affair.

However, all in all, *Theft Under the Sun* isn't too bad if you take it as a no-brain action movie. The action sequences (excepting the cheesy effects) are pretty well done and manage to generate at least some excitement -- something which cannot be said for many more "prestigious" films that waste too much time with dramatics rather than pyrotechnics. It's the type of movie that you won't be raving about, but it's a nice way to kill some time while quaffing a few brews and laughing at its' shortcomings. (by MrBlue of HKMDB)

**They Came to Rob Hong Kong (Hong Kong, 1989: Clarence Ford)** - A group of morons outside of Hong Kong (mainlanders then I suppose) are enlisted by Roy Cheung to rob a bank in Hong Kong. Unfortunately they're, as stated, morons, and can't do anything right.

The only redeeming quality of this movie is Chin Siu Ho's presence, which sticks out like a tree in a field among his idiot buddies. There are 3 action bits in this movie, and they're somewhat of a violent, Sammo-choreographed style that focus more on getting to a destination than sitting around battling man after man. The real failure, though, comes from Roy Cheung, who has too much time in the movie. He had no screen persona in High Voltage, and he has none in this. His demeanor says, "Get out of the way or my double will thrash you." Regardless, Chin Siu Ho has the majority of the sparse action.

The first part involves Roy Cheung and a few of his buddies in a scuffle with female cops. These ladies kick ass, seriously. At least that's what the director Clarence Ford and the editor wanted us to know. Boards smash over heads, the females grab television sets and swing them into the men's heads, they crash through walls, and practically annihilate a small shack where Roy Cheung was hiding. Cheung, as usual, comes off as a jerk who has nothing but size and mass behind his attacks. A note about the editing; it's quite good, with dozens of shots all working together perfectly for single sequences. It doesn't appear cheap either. All that bugged me was one of the girl's flips that came from nowhere, a very out-of-place move amongst all the smashing and brutalizing. At the end, Roy's stuntman goes off the edge of the roof in a stunt that COULDN'T have been intended. He falls down the side of the building grabbing at the hanging ropes for his dear life. Judge for yourself.

Chin Siu Ho has a quick fight in a bath house that I call the Sammo version of Jackie's massage parlour scene in Rush Hour 2. Siu Ho throws everyone who gets in his way and only fights when he's cornered. It feels like Sammo was right there the entire time because everything's economical. Very short but cool scene, the highlight of the film.

The end fight is large and spaced out quite a bit. Most of it involves Chin Siu Ho beating up countless bad guys. The set is actually pretty cool, which is just a huge complex of rooms all connected with doors and windows that people smash through. Of course Eric Tsang and his army of geniuses have to get their bits of fighting in, which aren't all that funny, and they always use some stupid trick to win, like rolling in a barrel. After they're done Siu Ho has a whole fight among a bunch of stacked tables. Inside, on top, underneath, he uses the whole thing, and some interesting stunts result (see pic of man falling). His fight against the strong man afterward isn't exactly complicated but the setting is beautifully lit, with the only light coming in through blinds. That makes it worth viewing alone. Chin Siu Ho and a female finish off Roy Cheung at the end in a complete violation of his manhood; he doesn't even get a punch in! It's great!

*They Came to Rob Hong Kong* isn't spectacular but shows some skill from Chin Siu Ho that has been lacking in his movies, especially in the late '80s and early '90s. If anything, get it for his sake, but you won't be getting a whole lot. You'll save yourself an ulcer if you skip all of Roy Cheung's acting scenes. (by Eric Jacobus of the Stunt People)

**Those Merry Souls (Hong Kong, 1985: Lau Kar-Wing) - aka From the Great Beyond** - Merry Souls (aka From the Great Beyond) felt like uncovering buried treasure – perhaps not a case of gold doubloons – but a lovely discovery nonetheless. I have never heard mention of this Yuen Biao film from anyone, but it turned out to be an enjoyable genre mixture of comedy, action and the supernatural. All three genres are handled quite well and the movie is a fast enjoyable 90-minutes of fun. It has the additional pleasure of having some of the Golden Harvest stars walk through for a quick cameo.

Yuen Biao's family has had a long tradition that he was unaware of as he grew up. But when circumstances change and now it falls upon him to uphold the duties, he is not particularly thrilled. This tradition is being a collector of the souls of the dead !

Yuen and his buddy Eric Tsang are both stuntmen for a HK film company and they spend much of their time chasing girls and getting into neighborhood fights. Life is pretty simple for the most part except for those times in which they have to leap off of a building or perform some other stunt. On the set, Sammo, Moon Lee, Wu Ma and Richard Ng make cameos.

Eric does his typical slightly frazzled and not too quick comic persona, but it is quite appealing here and his friendship with Yuen has a good feel to it. His father might seem a bit strange as he doodles in the supernatural. He is a bit of a pain at times because he is always warning Eric that today he should stay away from wood or water and that his life is already on the borrowed time of his dead mother. Later of course it turns out that having Lam Ching-Ying as a father can be very useful !

Yuen's father (Stanley Fung) is a bit odd as well. From time to time he gets a migraine headache and has to go home and sleep. When he does this his apparition comes out of his body and goes to collect the souls of the recently departed. It turns out that there are people on earth who have made a bargain in which they are soul collectors (not sure how much it pays in case you are interested). This deal passes from generation to generation. One stipulation though – if you bungle up a soul collection then the ghosts of all those souls you collected come looking to collect you. So if you know anyone who suffers from migraines, you may want to keep a close eye on them. Wait a second . . . my mother gets them all the time!

In fact a soul collection is bungled and things start getting a bit sticky. Soon Yuen is called into the family business and he, Eric, their girlfriends and Lam Ching-Ying all decide to fight for his soul and his life.

In terms of action Yuen has two good fights against a group of neighborhood roughnecks and then in the final showdown with Death there is some action from both Yuen and Lam Ching-Ying. The film is quite enjoyable and it takes time to develop the characters and the relationships of everyone. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Thunder Cop (Hong Kong, 1996: Clarence Ford)** - In Sex and Zen & A Bullet in the Head, Stefan Hammond and Mike Wilkins wrote that: "Director Clarence Ford (Fok Yiu-Leung) makes films noted for their wonderful visual style and nonlinear plotting. Sometimes, frankly, it's hard to tell just what the hell is going on. But Clarence has a pleasant habit of putting Carrie Ng in his movies, and that's not all bad" (1996:163-164).

The above assessment could serve as a generous summation of *THUNDER COP*: The 1996 jumble of an action film with which Clarence Ford chose to announce his return, after a few years away, to the Hong Kong movie-making scene. Unfortunately, despite her second billing (at least in the English language cast list), Carrie Ng's is but a largely extraneous as well as subsidiary role. Granted that I have a biased perspective (which is evidenced by my primary reason for wanting to view this contemporary actioneer being that Ms. Ng is in it). Still, it seems a travesty to me to have this real life sizzler -- Just check out the photo of her picking up the Best Supporting Actress award at the year 2000 HKFA ceremony! -- as well as thoroughly capable and game actress being reduced to playing a woman who tries to be sexually attractive but is perceived as too old and low class to be so.

I'd love to think that the local audience agreed with me on this matter. The odds are high though that there are other reasons why *THUNDER COP* only had a four day run in local cinemas and grossed but a paltry HK\$428,375 at the box office. This is not least since the movie -- whose main character is a well-meaning but hot-headed young policeman (Ng Chi Lone is played by the boyish looking Nicky Wu) who accidentally gets involved with a Triad chief (Chiu Kwok Ho comes in the form of a stylishly attired Winston Chao) whose nefarious colleagues are not too happy with his plans to withdraw from their underworld and immigrate to Canada with his girlfriend (Rene Lau is the homely but sweet Lau Mei Ying) -- is the kind of all-over-the-place and confused -- nonsensical even -- mish-mash movie that I've come to expect from the director of *The Black Panther Warriors* and *Cheap Killers*.

One illustration re these problematic aspects of *THUNDER COP* comes by way of the movie's too ambitiously taking its viewers from Taiwan to Hong Kong to Chang Chun (in Mainland China?) and back to Hong Kong before it reached the ten minute mark. Another measure of the offering's disordered nature is that even after having watched the entire film, I am unsure whether the incident-filled opening scenes consisted of flashbacks for the movie's childish but honorable police protagonist or its more adult and arguably more honorable "good gangster" figure. Even the most well filmed -- or, at least, best looking, attractively choreographed and well enacted -- portions of a movie which also has elements of broad comedy and melodramatic tragedy end up contributing to making the production feel stupidly illogical since they imbue otherwise quite average individuals with fighting abilities of the kind that ought to rightfully only be possessed by fantastic kungfu masters, superheroes or gods with guns.

Watching *THUNDER COP*, this (re)viewer can hardly believe that this mediocre effort was directed by the same man who helmed *Iceman Cometh* as well as made such good use of Carrie Ng's talents in *Naked Killer* and *Remains of a Woman* (The latter of which earned this able actress a Golden Horse Best Actress award). Although it is true that audiences can sometimes be un(der)appreciative of cinematic gems, this is one of those times when I reckon that those who stayed away from Clarence Ford's "come back" attempt were the ones who knew what they were doing. (by YTSL of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Thunder Cops II (Hong Kong, 1989: Jeff Lau)** - The sheer volume of movies cranked out of Hong Kong in the 1980's somewhat belies belief, and perhaps understandably, the on-the-fly nature of so many of them sometimes results in confusion. Such is the case for *Thunder Cops 2*. It should be simple enough -- it's the sequel to *Thunder Cops* right? Well, yes and no. In a nut shell, director Jeff Lau's 1988 sophomore feature *Operation Pink Squad* proved to be a hit, and within a year a sequel was in the works, predictably titled *Operation Pink Squad 2*. Both fall into the action comedy genre, with the sequel going for a supernatural slant. For reasons we'll likely never know, for some home video releases *Operation Pink Squad 2* was known as *Thunder Cops*, and for reasons we'll definitely never know, during the same year Lau would also grace our screens with *Thunder Cops 2*.

There are some tenuous connections between the trio. Apart from all being directed by Jeff Lau (who also turns up in a supporting role in all 3), each are headlined by Sandra Ng, with a supporting cast that features the likes of Ann Bridgewater and Wu Fung, and action direction duties going to Yuen Clan member Yuen Cheung Yan. However much like the *Tiger Cage* series, in each instalment everyone is playing a different character. Unlike the *Tiger Cage* movies though, which at least kept their theme of being no nonsense cops and robbers fight flicks, *Thunder Cops 2* quickly puts to rest the theory of there being any thematic connection.

Lau also enlists the services of Stephen Chow, here in an early screen appearance. The pair would collaborate again in 1995, when they'd make *Out of the Dark* and the 2 *A Chinese Odyssey* movies together (although thankfully Chow didn't return for the 3rd instalment, belatedly made in 2016). In 1989 Chow was still very much in the process of refining his comedic persona (he'd star alongside Jet Li in *Dragon Fight* the same year), compared to both Lau and Sandra Ng, who'd already established themselves to HK audiences as being associated with the comedy genre. So for *Thunder Cops 2*, you get the distinct impression the 3 of them sat in a room together, and decided that before they find themselves typecast for the rest of their careers, they'd have a crack at making a gritty and mean spirited revenge flick. Audience expectations be damned.

Or at least, they sat in a room together and had that conversation after the first day of filming. Indeed proceedings start out like many an 80's Hong Kong flick, with the rather light hearted sequence of Ng's bumbling traffic cop attempting to arrest a group of illegal street market vendors. In one of those only in a HK movie moments, she then inadvertently stumbles across her father policeman's (played by Eddie Ko) operation to arrest an armed drug dealer (played with a manic intensity by Sunny Fang). Looking to get in on the act, after the bust goes awry Ng finds herself able to sneak up on Fang from behind, and attempt to apprehend him by passing off the eggplant being held to his head as a gun. Comedy shenanigans all the way, except the eggplant trick doesn't work, and Fang ends up sending her father to an early grave.

Cue opening credits, and by the time we're back it's 1 year later. Gone is the bumbling traffic cop, and in her place is a shoot to kill badass hell bent on avenging her father, one that's all too happy to manipulate her junkie informant to help her track Fang down. That sure escalated quickly. It's safe to say that Ng's role in *Thunder Cops 2* is definitely an anomaly in her career, with a Jeff Lau at the helm who seems to have been influenced by the work John Woo was doing around the same time (The Killer came out the same year).

Watching Ng let loose with a Beretta in each hand shouldn't work, but somehow it does, and Lau shows an unusual cruel streak in the violence he orchestrates. A confrontation on the steps of a wedding hall (newlywed couple included), ends with the bride and groom caught in the crossfire with tragic results, reflecting an aesthetic that doesn't shy away from showcasing the civilian collateral damage. Lau and action director Yuen Cheung Yan opt to

film the bullet ballets mostly in slow motion, with the brief parts that play out in real time acting as explosive bursts of visual punctuation, which for the most part works. There's an almost ethereal like quality to the bullet riddled mayhem, almost as if the slow motion is meant to represent time slowing down, and it creates a unique feel that heroic bloodshed aficionados will surely get a kick out of.

This is done particularly well in a scene which see's Ng rescue Chow from a group of assailants. The whole scene plays out from Chow's perspective who's been knocked to the floor, as he watches Ng pump the bad guys full of lead looking like a sort of dreamy angel of death. It's a cool scene, and a distinctly different approach from other movies that were looking to ape the John Woo aesthetic around the same time, such as *City War*. Speaking of John Woo, it also can't be denied that Chow's limp addled brother to Shing Fui On's drug dealing pimp, is undoubtedly modelled after Chow Yun Fat's physical disposition in *A Better Tomorrow*.

The action isn't only limited to gun fights though, with the appearance of Ng's partner played by Taiwanese stalwart Lin Hsiao Lu guaranteeing at least one scene of quality fisticuffs. Hsiao Lu starred in many of the late 80's Taiwanese kung-fu flicks, usually alongside Alexander Lo Rei, and can be seen showing off her considerable talents in the likes of *Kung Fu Student* and *Emergency Police Lady* (both from the same year). She's perhaps best known though as *The Child of Peach*, in which she played the peach powered son (which part of that title do you want to discuss first?) across 4 movies. Here she gets a hard hitting knockdown, drag out brawl against two assailants which takes place on a construction site, and while it's the only real fight scene of the movie (unless you count Sandra Ng vs. Stephen Chow), it more than delivers. Impacts, hard falls, and some impressive choreography are all present and accounted for.

When it comes to everything else though, *Thunder Cops 2* doesn't really hit the mark. While it's well known that many Hong Kong movies had their scripts made up as they went along during the golden era, here it's never felt truer. There's a real feeling that, outside of the plot outline of a police woman looking to avenge the death of her father, everything else was simply made up on the fly. Notably Stephen Chow doesn't even turn up until over an hour in, and he's never really around long enough to feel like a significant character, despite his appearance in the finale being reliant on the audience being invested in him. There's something reassuringly familiar about seeing Shing Fui On turn up in a movie like this, however his character here is simply a means for Ng to get to her father's killer, and subsequently also ends up receiving short thrift.

Special mention has to go to Ann Bridgewater, who as a junkie informer is about as far away from her sexy turn in *Full Contact* 3 years later as you can imagine. Playing a character who's opening scene involves being pummelled (note: not in a violent way) by Shing Fui On while Sandra Ng watches on from inside a closet, she definitely puts her all into the role, even if the movie over all isn't worthy of it. In fact everyone in *Thunder Cops 2* looks like they want to be there, so the blame for its incohesive nature would seem to lay largely with Lau himself, a theory that certainly isn't outside the realms of possibility when you look at his overall filmography.

By the time the credits abruptly roll on *Thunder Cops 2*, which let's face it isn't such a surprise in Hong Kong cinema, I was left with a distinct feeling that I'd watched an unruly and disorganised mess of a movie, with some sprinkles of brilliance thrown in haphazardly. At one point Chow refers to Ng and himself as "one bitch and one cripple", which perhaps would have been a more fitting title, although certainly no less misleading. *Thunder Cops 2* is carried along on Ng's shoulders (as is Chow in one scene), and for the most part she keeps it watchable, now with the added retrospective ingredient of nostalgia. Is it a good movie though? Not really. (by Paul Bramhall)

**Thunder Run (Hong Kong, 1991: Tyrone Hsu Hsia)** - Hong Kong cops Ju (Ray Lui) and Leong (Alex Fong) succeed but break protocol during a mission at home (being part of the Flying Tiger Team) so they're sent on leave. Vietnam is the choice but soon thereafter Leong is caught on a false drug smuggling charge and sent to a brutal prison camp out in the forests. The lawlessness of the land means authorities won't be able to help out so Ju consciously goes in after Leong as a prisoner himself. Seeing his friend break down psychologically through torture and gangsters bullying him, their friendship makes them both focus on an escape plan, together with an even more bullied dwarf in the prison camp...

Hsu Hsia probably rips off half a dozen flicks (and scores) for his prison actioner but being less of a seasoned viewer myself (and even if not), *Thunder Run* is a fun exercise in concrete, unpretentious intentions. Director Hsu knows to push buttons, meaning first of all a larger than life cinematic tapestry where nothing really feels like a life circumstance snapshot. It's all an excuse to go excessive on us. Prison warden played gleefully over the top by William Ho makes sure for instance troublesome inmates will get a bath together with hungry rats. Other sights include Alex Fong experiencing a cavity search, Ray Lui biting the head of a snake in defiance and the actor actually comes off quite well as a tough, action hero throughout the film. Add a seemingly worthless but in the end sympathetic part for the actor playing the dwarf and good enough doses of pretty general gunplay/fisticuffs

mayhem and *Thunder Run* will mean easily digested, genre stuff to you. And that's fun when done even somewhat right. Ha Chi-Jan, Jason Pai and Fung Hak-On also appear. (So Good Reviews)

**Thunderbolt (Hong Kong, 1995: Gordon Chan)** - Jackie Chan is a mechanic named....um, Jackie, who sometimes assists police in stopping illegal street racers. He crosses paths with Cougar (TN), an international criminal and avid racer. Cougar kidnaps his sisters and forces Jackie to follow him to Japan to race in order to save the girls.

Fight #1 --- Jackie vs a couple of perverts - When 2 guys sexually harass his little sister, JC puts the smack down on 'em. It's short but there's a couple of nice kicks: a roundhouse that segues into a jump-spinning roundhouse. It's not the best edited or framed fight but it has its moments.

Fight #2 --- Jackie vs thugs - This is at his garage/impound yard. Good fight; very fast flow! This is full of good kicks and includes an especially sweet back-spinning leg sweep. It has some elements of JC's typical 'run-n-gun' fight style, but not too much. It ends nicely by him corralling the thugs into the auto-paint chamber and activating the sprayers. (The editing is a little too quick and choppy in places, and some segments are shot entirely too close up.)

Later there is an awesome stunt sequence as Cougar uses a crane to destroy Jackie's home and business which is apparently constructed of metal cargo freight trailers. *It's pretty wild!*

Fight #3 --- Jackie vs Kong (Ken Lo) & the Yakuza - This occurs in Japan at a pachinko parlor. Best fight! There is a ton of action here! Chan pulls off some great kicks including some impressive triple kicks. Ken Lo is always good to see (though I think underused here) and takes a particularly hard fall at one point. *What's unique is that when the tattooed Yakuza members come running in, everything goes into blurry slo-mo and that's generally not typical in JC's films.* There's also lots of wire-assisted falls and leaps, again not usually typical. The choreography is good but again the editing is choppy at times. Still, Chan doesn't fail to impress.

*There is no end fight.* The film culminates in a big race showdown with Jackie and Cougar. It does end in a pretty crazy car stunt/crash though.

JC wasn't keen on having this released outside China for various reasons and because it doesn't represent his best work. And I confess....it doesn't. But to me, for a long time this movie was a Holy Grail of sorts, and I managed to score a dvd of it about 3 yrs before it finally got a US release.

It's flaws? Well, some of the car chases/racing is horribly under-cranked, not much but enough. The beginning doesn't really jibe with the rest of the film. The action peaks way too early and the race at the end is drawn out way too long.

So what's so intriguing about it? *There are none of the usual physical comedy bits here that Chan typically interjects either in the story or the fights.* (Actually there's no comedy or funny bits whatsoever.) *And it is a rare treat in that JC battles in "hate" mode; he is angry and aggressive.* I don't think he's "acted" that way except in one of his earlier classical MA films of the 70's. (Can't think what it could possibly be though off the top of my head. Maybe someone can.)

Still, for all its imperfections, this is a good Jackie Chan film with better action than many of his 21st Century releases. It's well worth your time to check this out. Get this!!! (by Scott Blasingame)

**Tian Di (Hong Kong, 1994: David Lai)** - Andy Lau is Cheung Ye-Pang, a righteous police officer who gets sent by the Nanking government to affluent Shanghai, circa 1930. His job is officially to stop the opium trade, which was apparently at insane heights back then. The big problem: it's not just evil businessman Tai Chai-Man (Damian Lau) who runs the opium trade, it's also Police Commissioner Ni Kwan (Gu Bao-Ming). In fact, Cheung Ye-Pang may be the only clean cop in all of Shanghai, as evidenced by his lack of support by the entire city, as well as some higher-ups in Shanghai, who throw more red tape at Cheung than he can possibly handle. Thankfully, he finds a couple of allies who help him the only way they can: busting into known drug smuggling locations and shooting off a couple of million bullets. This leads to over-the-top action sequences, as well as the expected fallout as those in bed with the bad guys (i.e., everyone but four people in Shanghai) attempt to exact their revenge. Eventually many people die, an end not limited to just cannon fodder or innocent passerbys, though many of them buy it too. Tian Di is simply awash with a mountain of corpses.



Excessive is probably the best word for *Tian Di*, a film which takes a noble, historically-set story and fills it up with more bang-up action than your average John Woo movie. Bodies fly, innocents fall, and any semblance of concealing a crime is left on the cutting room floor as the body count reaches dangerously high numbers. The film has an impressive setting and cinematography, and the period detail feels quite authentic. What doesn't feel authentic are the characters in the film, who aren't really characters. Everyone exists as a "type" from a cop/gangster screenwriting handbook. Cheung Ye-Pang is so righteous that he's basically asking for a bullet in the back, and the big crime kingpins are so annoyingly evil that they can commit murder in public places and not arouse any suspicion whatsoever. The evil cops also strain believability; they flaunt their corruption without any care of censure or punishment, and basically invite a too-righteous do-gooder like Cheung Ye-Pang to try to take them to task. When it all comes down to it, *Tian Di* is just totally ridiculous.

Not that ridiculousness makes it a totally bad movie. Well, *Tian Di* is more or less a bad movie, but it's also an entertaining one. The sheer energy of Yuen Tak's action sequences makes *Tian Di* an decent diversion, even if wacky action is incongruous with the rest of the production. It just feels wrong to have a whole crowdful of innocents get whacked AND the main perpetrator get away with it. Also, Cheung Ye-Pang apparently has bullet-dodging powers, a feat made all the more impressive since he—and every other character in the film—seems to be made of cardboard. As films go, *Tian Di* is unoriginal, tiredly tragic, and relentlessly over-the-top. It can also be fun, but only if you forget to take it seriously. (by Kozo of LoveHKFilm.com)

**Tiger Angels (Taiwan, 1997: Sek Bing-Chan)** - This movie appears to be shot back-to-back with "Super Cops." Here, Yukari and Cynthia Khan are a pair of bodyguards retained by a department store manager to protect his father from kidnapping. There is a mildly entertaining sub-plot about a computer salesman who acts as a double for the store manager - with positive effects on his marriage, colleagues and business. As with many Taiwanese films, this movie is tolerable if viewed as a gentle, low budget parody - albeit with one gratuitous soft-core porn scene. At times Yukari acts in a rather exaggerated manner, lacking her usual finesse. Her fight scenes are also quite variable. While some sequences are energetic, she seems somewhat heavier and slower than in earlier movies. Cynthia Khan doesn't have much to do in this film, and there isn't much by way of plot. The gang kidnaps the father. Yukari rescues him. Favorite line (Yukari): "These people are stupid, shit." (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Tiger Cage (Hong Kong, 1988: Yuen Woo-Ping)** - For the longest time, I've shown a disinterest in the movie due to the fact that there wasn't as much hand-to-hand set-pieces as I hoped and that it wasn't as entertaining as the sequel. But I actually enjoyed it alot this time around. I still think the plain direction and uninteresting script bring down the movie but overall it was fun watching the story progress. With the script also comes lots of HK clichés and wtf moments (the moments that play out during the fight inside Uncle Tai's apartment). It didn't help with the characters either because of the stiff and lifeless acting performances. Ng Man-Tat and Donnie had the most conflicting roles but the potentials ain't showing at all and only lead to typical 80s melodramatic acting territory. But for what it sets out to be, that's something to marvel at: a pessimistic/dark tale of cops doing their jobs catching criminals and handling police corruption. And the action being brutal in any form already forgives the flaws the movie have. **Rating: 6.7/10** (by DiP of KFF)

**Tiger Cage 2 (Hong Kong, 1990: Yuen Woo-Ping)** - The story here is nothing to write home about, just your typical themes of mistaken identity and accidental plot points to spice things up. Out of all three TC entries, this has the worst plot. But that being said, I think it's the most entertaining TC movie because this has everything that any standard contemporary HK action comedy by either Chan or Sammo would have. Direction here is nothing new either but I do think Woo Ping handled things better here by adding more comedy and less of that plainness and dullness from his other modern action movies. Woo Ping is not known for investing alot of time on acting performances so what's on display here isn't going to be remarkable and memorable. Just characters being there to fill out the time between the action scenes. But I do have to point out that once in a while in Woo Ping's movies you can spot potential in one role being more than just a fighting character and I felt David Wu embodied that despite nothing coming out of his overall performance. This being an actioner though, there's alot to be satisfied about. Woo Ping and Donnie doesn't disappoint and really get to show their talents and does everyone else participating the fighting scenes. **Rating: 7.1/10** (by DiP of KFF)

**Tiger Cage 3 (Hong Kong, 1991: Yuen Woo-Ping)** - James (Cheung Gwok Leung) finds himself set back after a dirty deal and, his fiancée Sharla Cheung gone to Wong Kam Kong, he deals with the baddies personally.

*Tiger Cage 3* is an fine piece of pie when it comes to action. Don't bother interpreting the plot. I had a better time watching it silently as I captured the video to take screen shots. It all winds down to Cheung, an all-rounder-

extremist in HK cinema, practically dying and making a phantom of the opera-style comeback. It's very cool. Sharla Cheung; I dunno why, but I liked her. But as for Michael Wong, the guy has to either ditch movies altogether or stop taking bits in the fight scenes. I'll elaborate later. Wong doesn't ruin anything, though. Cheung holds his own against troves of enemies and later against stuntman Ridley Tsui Bo Wah, the highlight of the movie. The finest quality of *Tiger Cage 3* is the pace of the action. Only one man has had such perfect pace in the history of fight choreography; Yuen Shun Yee, who choreographed everything with the help of Guk Hin Chiu.

Michael Wong has his bit in the beginning. Cheung kicks him across the head, and Wong's reaction involves jumping onto a desk.

Cheung has a small fight in his house where he tosses a stuntman around for a second. They go to the roof and Cheung counters everything he does with precise TKD kicks. It may look odd at first, but viewers soon realize that everything in the movie is done at real speed. Nothing's undercranked. Cheung's form, then, is pretty good. At the end he jumps on top of a moving car and falls off, probably just for the sake of doing a cool stunt.

Cheung goes looking for Sharla at a mill and ends up in a scuffle there. The first part on the conveyor belt is hard to see with Cheung's black pants blending in perfectly with the background. Afterwards he has some great looking kicks on the ground against a few men, and then he fights a long-haired John Cheung. John's kicks aren't hot but he has fine handwork. The two exchange punches that mostly connect to the face and body, and the pacing is wonderful thanks to great Shun Yee.

Cheung stunt where he's hit by a van is amazing. I had to capture it in multiple frames for you.

Another fight, this time involving a dozen men against one. Cheung hops off two men and kicks a third in the beginning, and does it again with 2 men later. Mostly 2 hit counters against five men per shot, all very well done. Later we see Cheung punching their heads and blood exploding from skulls, and plenty of falls. Michael Wong comes to save the day, and while he has the speed to keep up with 4 men fighting him at the same time, he always leaves his body wide open. It makes for a somewhat unbelievable scene. The two-minute bout ends soon after.

Cheung Gwok Leung has a brutal scene against John Cheung. One stunt grabbed me in particular John's double fell back against the inside of a scaffolding, then down onto his stomach on the ground 10 feet below while the whole structure came tumbling down (second pic). After that he grabs a gigantic sledge hammer and swings that around, only with Yuen-choreographed grace. Finally they both grab burning logs and fight using those. It's spectacular, but nothing too complex because of the obvious danger involved. You can clearly see the pads in their backs too. John Cheung is stabbed, and the scene ends.

The end scene is the best part of the package. First we have Mak Wai Cheung making a cameo getting hit by a baseball bat in the face. Then Cheung fights Ridley Tsui, the psycho from *Panty hose Hero*. Again the timing is great. The handwork shines especially and Ridley boxes like Donnie Yen. He must take 5 backfalls in this scene alone, all straight to his shoulders. Cheung does picture-perfect arial kicks including one I've never seen; jumping outside crescent to an inside sweep. The whole scene between the two is a minute long, but it has everything that makes a great fight.

If *Tiger Cage 3* only had more, it would have rivaled its prequel *Tiger Cage 2*. The lighting was sometimes unforgiving, though the end fight was well captured. I think they could have picked a better tough guy than John Cheung, but I thought their choice of Ridley Tsui was a fine one. I've never seen him used so extensively. And lastly, Cheung Gwok Leung is a sight to behold. He's another action superstar who didn't get enough time in the spotlight. He can do everything, and I wish he had done more of it. *Tiger Cage 3* is easy to find, so go pick up the dvd at ebay or from a Hong Kong DVD retailer. It shouldn't be missed, despite the low quantity. (by Eric Jacobus of The Stunt People)

**Tiger on Beat (Hong Kong, 1988: Lau Kar-Leung)** - Like many Hong Kong films of this time there are both highs and lows. I tend to appreciate a film more if it has highs than a film that is overall more solid but does not have scenes as excellent as the former. We tend to remember the high points and unless the lows are bottom-dwelling we tend to forget them. However, this film has one low point that is not easily forgotten and one high point that is also not easily forgotten.

This movie is a small ode to *Lethal Weapon* (and one obvious scene reference) with muscular cop Michael Cho (Conan Lee, his second HK film; funny enough he would be in *Lethal Weapon 4*) and eventual partner Francis Li (Chow Yun-fat) in the mismatched partner cop subgenre. Is there an earlier film of this type in Hong Kong?

Conan is a bit stiff as an actor, but luckily Chow has enough charisma for several people. I do wonder about his character arc though. He comes across as cowardly in the beginning, but sure does not end that way. The humor is sometimes funny especially with Chow's boyish enthusiasm but when it delves into misogynist behavior it is less effective. I do love seeing the former Shaw Brothers actors from Lau's brother Lau Kar-wing, to David Chiang, Phillip Ko, Gordon Liu, Ti Lung (great appearance here) and more.

I find it funny that posters of Sylvester Stallone are in both the good and bad guys' abodes.

Without the ending I doubt this film would have been rated so highly, but seriously what an ending. The chainsaw duel is most often referenced with this film and rightfully so. But fans of Lau Kar-leung should expect great action. I do not think of this so much as a Lau Kar-leung film but more of a Cinema City production with Lau helming the fight scenes and overall structure. I have doubts that Lau would have been happy with some of the character's actions like the overtly misogynistic tone that pervades some of the scenes -- most famously the Chow Yun-fat beating of Marydonna\* (Nina Li Chi who would later marry Jet Li), her quickly forgetting about her brother's death, and her subsequent conversion to good person and falling in love with the person who beat her up only to be killed a little while later.

Anyone trying to wield a shotgun like that would probably shoot themselves.

This was a big box office hit in Hong Kong. It is followed by a sequel that is apparently mostly in name only since most of the characters do not reappear.

\* I have read that Chow was not happy with this scene; however, I cannot find the origin of this comment. (by MasterofOneInchPunch of KFF)

**Tiger on the Beat 2 (Hong Kong, 1990: Lau Kar-Leung)** - Those who regard the director of this in-name-only sequel to a popular action comedy that starred Chow Yun-Fat, Conan Lee and Nina Li Chi as "Hong Kong's neglected master" (See Stefan Hammond's "Hollywood East", 2000:86) probably will be appalled by it being so that when this under-appreciator of Old School kung fu flicks -- someone who will readily admit to having viewed and enjoyed more Fruit Chan and Wong Kar Wai films than that of Lau Kar Leung -- first saw him in action in "The Thirty Million Dollar Rush", I thought he was Teddy Robin Kwan. To prevent a potentially dangerous further heightening of their blood pressure, here's suggesting that fans of the man who also has been affectionately referred to as "The Pops" might want to forego reading (the rest of) this less than positive write-up of a Karl Maka executive produced work that -- with the (almost sole) exception of the many stuntmen who appeared to be immensely willing to suffer for their "art" and did so over the course of the filming of this offering -- this (re)viewer really does not think reflects well on anybody involved in its making.

For starters, TIGER ON THE BEAT 2 has one of those wafer thin action movie plots that have given Hong Kong films an overall and collective bad rap. In lieu of this generally mediocre offering's story line not involving a couple of cop comrades in arms though, in addition to the script's usual chief function of linking together a series of opportunities to stage a good number of painful-looking fights and pain-inducing stunts (one of which -- more specifically, a 35 foot fall that gets shown from a couple of different angles -- actually caused one of the work's leads to wind up in hospital for a few months), somewhat plausible reasons were being sought for: A middle-aged policeman (Yick Lim -- whose rank gets variously identified as "sergeant" and "captain" -- is portrayed by an often exasperated looking Danny Lee) to get involved in the affairs of a boy-man referred to as Buffalo (who is frequently over-played by the American-Chinese Conan Lee); and the two disparate personalities to have some modicum of interest in the welfare of a pretty annoying female character (The inappropriately named Sweet Dream comes in the quite buxom form of Ellen Chan).

As it turned out, the first of those relations was fairly easily made by way of having the unsophisticated plainclothes detective turn out to be Buffalo's uncle, who gets charged by his U.S. resident elder sister to find her bachelor as well as sailor son -- i.e., the aforementioned Buffalo -- a good woman to marry (or at least be interested in seriously pursuing). Even if not particularly imaginatively, the second connection did get rather conveniently established using the "accidents" and "coincidences" route which had TIGER ON THE BEAT 2's one-dimensional protagonists and de facto female lead just happening to be in a range of places at the same time (plus involved Sweet Dream coming to possess a murdered criminal's ring that is needed by his betrayers to carry out a lucrative drug deal).

Since a bunch of fortuitous "twists of fate" plus some less fortunate "chance occurrences" also are what get relied upon to bring about further major story developments in TIGER ON THE BEAT 2, it seems manifestly clear that little thought was spent by scriptwriters Wong Ho Yee and Cheung Kai Yee on seeking to do much more than connect the

plot dots. For that matter, neither did much effort appear to have been put in by them towards endowing this work's considerable number of subsidiary characters -- who include the more than occasionally Keystone Cops-like police officers played by Maria Cordero, James Wong, Norman Tsui and some much less familiar faced actors along with the generic acting villains of the piece essayed by the likes of Roy Cheung, Gordon Liu and Mark Houghton -- with all that much depth; so much so that I got moved to suspecting that the probable major purpose for having so many of them around might well have been to ensure that this offering would actually be a movie length production.

Considering the number of able fighters and drama-capable personnel in its cast (and at the crew's disposal), one of the biggest missteps of all by director Lau Kar Leung -- and those others who had the power to really make a difference with regards to the quality and such of *TIGER ON THE BEAT 2* -- may well have been to have this production primarily be a comedy (rather than a more serious, all-out actioner). In all honesty, since I don't consider myself to have been in a particularly demanding mood when settling down to view this much talent-wasting effort, I would have been prepared to (largely) overlook *TIGER ON THE BEAT 2* having the kind of inept scripting it has -- that additionally manifested itself in the clumsy way in which a series of heavy-handed comments about the (then impending) 1997 Handover were clumsily inserted into the 1990 movie along with the frequent use of the "F" word as the frustrated expression of choice for the American Buffalo -- if there had been some bona fide powerhouse or slick action in it to enjoy. Instead, I find myself suggesting that others spare themselves the experience I had of getting irritated by: Seeing such implausibilities as Danny Lee driving a fast-moving car without having any hands on its steering wheel along with Conan Lee sometimes feeling the bloody effects of glass shards cutting his bare feet but other times not seeming to do so; never mind finding it impossible to ignore the large amount of typos and grammatical mistakes that blight this workmanlike offering's not too professionally rendered English subtitles. (by YTSL of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Time and Tide (Hong Kong, 2000: Tsui Hark)** - If I could get away with it, my entire review of *Time and Tide* would read, "Wow."

Because I can't, I'll say I've never been gladder that a film didn't star Jean-Claude Van Damme.

Two years since the double disasters that were *Double Team* and *Knock Off* (and four years since his last Van Dammeless film), Tsui Hark returns to directing films in Hong Kong. And boy howdy does he return. *Time and Tide* is a stylistic tour de force. Tsui has taken pages from the books of Wong Kar Wai, Luc Besson, and John Woo, added his trademark storytelling and gorgeous cinematography and produced a movie constantly in motion, full of both people and cameras that can defy gravity.

Tyler (Nicholas Tse, a lot more endearing here than in *Gen-X Cops*) is a bartender with a problem. He got a young woman drunk and then pregnant. And she's an undercover cop. And she has a lesbian lover, who is also a cop. To rectify this situation to some degree Tyler takes a job as an unlicensed bodyguard and gives the money to the woman. If only his employers would give him a real gun, he'd be all set.

Jack (Wu Bai) also has a problem. His wife is pregnant, and some of his old mercenary buddies from Brazil have stolen a lot of money from the Brazilian army and want his help to launder it in Hong Kong. Jack refuses, mainly because the leader of the mercenaries, Miguel, wants Jack to assassinate his wife's father. Tyler briefly befriends Jack, but an escalating game of cat and mouse between Jack and the Miguel threatens his life.

The plot here isn't anything special, and the script feels like Wong Kar Wai on speed. But the action scenes are some of the best I've seen. Jack and Miguel could give Spider-Man a run for his money, especially in the awe-inspiring shoot-out in an apartment complex in Kowloon. This may not be the most realistic action movie ever made, but it will make your jaw drop, simply because it is so audacious. Welcome back, Tsui. (by Scott Hamilton of *Attack of the 50-Foot DVD*)

**To Kiss is Fatal (Hong Kong, 1998: Tony Liu)** - Chen Xiong is a handsome, wealthy young man who wins a martial arts competition. When he returns with his girlfriend to his deceased father's villa on an island, a strange series of mishaps unfolds. First, his pets are killed, then two of the servants. A third servant is seriously injured while trying to summon help. When the police arrive, the bodies have disappeared. It turns out that Xiong's friends, who have come to visit him, are actually behind this attempt to scare and intimidate him. Wearing black robes to disguise their identity, they attack him and kidnap his girlfriend. Director Wong Chun Yeung as usual explores darker emotions and motives. The conspirators are variously motivated by greed, envy or simply poverty in their attempt to extort a valuable collection of jewels from Xiong.

An additional twist is provided by Yukari's character Yi Hua who is flatly rebuffed by Xiong after asking him for a date. She's the most ambivalent of the group, and saves Xiong's life when the gang eventually attempts to kill him. After Xiong escapes, moral distinctions are further blurred by his descent into a campaign of vengeance. His former friends increasingly resemble victims as he kills or maims them in a series of one-on-one martial arts duels. Although he spares Yi Hua, he chokes her and cuts her neck with wild bamboo. The others ignore her warnings and fatally over-estimate their ability to outwit Xiong.

Although relatively light on action and having a distinctly "Western" cinematic feel, this film is an interesting example of Mainland morality. Crime, force and individualism don't pay. Yukari's character has three brief fights - one with Xiong, one in a competition using a spear, and one in which she demolishes two young punks who harass her in a karaoke lounge. Her character is depicted as rejected, love-sick and ridiculed. She even performs a karaoke love song while several of the audience make fun of her. It's an uncomfortable role, and there's no happy ending. This is one of several recent roles involving rejection or isolation. While it seems that Yukari's casting has definitely shifted in this direction, the significance of this is unclear. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**To Live and Die in Tsimshatsui (Hong Kong, 1994: Andrew Lau)** - An undercover cop Ah Kit (Jacky Cheung) and his best friend Ah Bong are sent in to get evidence on a crime boss known as Coffin Tung. After a raid goes wrong and Tung is killed, his gang splits into two factions. Kit is sent to infiltrate the one led by Roy Cheung and Bong is sent into the other gang. Being separated from his best friend (not to mention feeling responsibility for the death of Tung, someone who he had admired) sends Kit into a downward spiral. It doesn't help things out when he gets drunk at his girlfriend's (Lai) mother's birthday party and makes an ass out of himself, which causes Lai to run to Kit's sleazy superior. Kit's only solace is the occasional night out drinking with Bong. During one of these drinking sessions, the two hook up with low-level hood Tony Leung Ka-Fai, who is having his own domestic problems, but manages to help Kit get in good with Roy Cheung and his bitchy sister Wu Chien-Lin. As you might imagine, all these loose ends draw together near the end of the film and Kit must decide whom to help -- the cops he hates but feels he has a duty to or the hoods who he has grown to treat as his family.

I was surprised how much I enjoyed *To Live and Die*. The plot has been done many times before, especially by Lau, who would go on to direct several similar movies in the next few years, including the Young and Dangerous series. But the script is well-written and manages to give all the characters enough room to develop so that they don't become the cookie-cutter gangsters and cops all too present in this type of movie.

Even the romantic subplots (which normally ruin or drastically slow down most crime films) are well-handled, with very little in the way of melodrama. Speaking of which, Lau's direction keeps the pacing tight and thankfully free of the overacting which can destroy this type of movie. All of the actors work well in the movie, especially Jacky Cheung, who manages to restrain himself enough to give a believable portrayal of a cop that's gone too far undercover. Wu Chien-Lin (probably one of the most under-rated HK actresses) also gives a good performance, elevating her character above the one-dimensional female seen all too much in films on both sides of the ocean. Unfortunately, the same can't be said for Gigi Lai, who seems to only be in the film as window dressing. But thankfully her character doesn't figure too heavily into the plot in the long run. Roy Cheung does his standard cool gangster role to near perfection and Tony Leung Ka-Fai is also quite good as a cowardly Triad who holds secrets of his own.

Though there is little in the way of action, what is in there (mainly a shootout in the middle and at the end, which were directed by Wong Jing) is well done, and, actually, adding Woo-style gunplay to the film would have probably taken away from the plot. The only real detriment to *To Live and Die* is the ending. The plot is wrapped up much too quickly and the tone is just too happy compared to the bleak setup of the finale. It comes off as very "Hollywood," where everything is wrapped up into a nice little package just to satisfy the audience. But otherwise, *To Live and Die* is a good mix of action, drama and romance that's well worth watching. (by MrBlue of HKMDB)

**Tokyo Raiders (Hong Kong, 2000: Jingle Ma)** - The monster Lunar New Year hit of 2000 features an all-star cast and all-star hijinks. Tony Leung Chiu-Wai stars as Lam, the toughest private eye in Tokyo. Despite his small stature and broken Japanese, he owns the Tokyo streets with his suave charisma and John Steed-like fighting skills. He falls in with jilted bride Macy (Kelly Chan), who arrives in Tokyo chasing her wayward groom Takahashi (Toru Nakamura of *Gen-X Cops*). Tailing her is interior designer Yung (Ekin Cheng), who's after Takashi to settle a debt. Soon their paths cross and mayhem ensues. Various factions are after Macy for reasons not entirely unknown, and it seems that Lam and Yung may have a few secrets themselves.

Disbelief must be suspended during the course of this 2-hour action comedy as the fighting is over-the-top and the characters are beyond silly (Ekin Cheng as a five-time wushu champion?). Eventually the main plot is uncovered, and quite frankly it isn't all that interesting. What saves the movie is action and lots of it. It seems every other scene contains some excuse for a fight or chase sequence. Leung handles himself well during his well-choreographed action scenes, and he even manages to do most of his own stunts. Cheng fakes his fighting pretty well, and he fits his annoying, wacky character to a T. Kelly Chan looks great, which is par for the course for her.

I'm not being too overly critical of this movie, which is another in HK's big-budget action sweepstakes. I've begun to frown upon poorly-plotted HK action spectacles, but *Tokyo Raiders* manages to remind us that it's all in the name of fun. Unlike the ridiculous *2000 A.D.*, *Tokyo Raiders* acknowledges its unrealism with the occasional wink to the audience. Director Jingle Ma doesn't inject much unnecessary emotion into the film, and he rarely slows the pace.

The only boring patches are the requisite soul-searching by Macy, who can't understand the loss of her fiancée. After that, just forget about any cheesy romance angle. Watch for the action, the location (in addition to directing, Ma provides his usual superlative cinematography), and for Tony Leung, who once again shows why he's one of Hong Kong's most popular actors. His charm and easy charisma lets us know from frame one: this is all in fun. And it is. (by Kozo of LoveHKFilm)

**Too Many Ways to Be No. 1 (Hong Kong, 1997: Wai Ka-Fei)** - "A story should have a beginning, a middle and an end, but not necessarily in that order." – Jean-Luc Godard

This is Milkyway's first official production.\* For fans of Hong Kong movies this is an auspicious start. For Johnnie To's co-production company has brought henceforth sagacious cinema that is one of the most unique and personal in cinema today. This movie still remains one of the most experimental and different in Milkyway's oeuvre while still retaining personal tropes that are seen in the later films.

A time-repeating narrative (forking path – though in this film it feels somewhat like a cinematic "choose your own adventure") that predates *Run Lola Run* but is after *Groundhog's Day*. It starts off with the ticking of a Tudor timepiece\*\* – an expensive watch owned by Wong Ah Kau (Lau Ching-wan) that has three close-ups in the film each signifying a restart in the story. It was probably bought in a previous time of prosperity for this rascal as he is now relegated to selling funeral wreaths for money and he is seeing a fortune-teller as the film starts. You do not get to hear what the seer has to say until the end of the film. Wong is 32, the same age as Bruce Lee when he died, and has not made anything of himself. He is approached by Bo (Cheung Tat-ming) of the rather incompetent Hung Lok Gang to join him in a meeting to discuss a future job. His acceptance of this job will lead him to the Mainland in the first story. If he does not it will lead him to Taiwan in the second story.

This is the type of film that so much is intertwined that I am not sure what would be considered a spoiler. With everything written *below you might hesitate on reading further if you are sensitive to spoilers* or want to watch the film with not too much information. But I also noticed that while writing about this it behooves to not do a straight recap of the film. It is too serpentine and too filled with clever allegories and references.

Going over the third segment it seems that there will be a different result than the previous two (given the dialogue is different.) It is obvious that the handover metaphor deals with a potential future with either Mainland or Taiwan as a dead-end or crippling event. I do wonder what the third option would have been. The fortune teller states that it isn't either Taiwan or the Mainland but "It is your heart" in how he makes his choice. Of course by the end of the second story he has both fame and money, but at a price I do not think he was willing to pay. Is his character in a cyclical hell? Or can he progressively improve his position? Can Hong Kong improve its position given these two choices?

A negative aspect to this movie is the overuse of the hand-held wide-angle lens (9.8mm same size used in *Fallen Angels* (1995)) much to To's chagrin. Sometimes it works well and gives the film an off-kilter otherworldly feel and is adaptive and playful. Sometimes it does not like when he does a whole fight scene upside down which was certainly discombobulating and not all the effective as aesthetics or allegory (its use is to demarcate the choice where Wong Ah Kau's life can go in very different directions.) It is telling that Wai did not do another solo directorial effort until 2004's *Fantasia*. To's past criticism about the film is correct from a formal standpoint, but there is an anarchy here that works well.

The more I go over this, the more I am impressed with the complexity of the plot, the sardonic and often dark humor and how much this does fit into the Milkyway portfolio. The comedic lopping off of fingers reminds me of the similar use in *The Odd One Dies*. But it is not unique to see similarities between Milkyway films. Carmen Lee plays a

redemptive female in both this and *The Odd One Dies* (Stephen Teo notes this and the film *Loving You* which I have not seen.) \*\*\* The use of duality is here with an exact Doppelgänger with the Taiwan Triad bosses (since they are brothers) and is especially present as there are many similarities between the two paths: yet some subtle and important differences that are eked out on rewatches. Some characters cannot outrun their destiny (like Lee Fung Yee in *Running on Empty*): the boss, the drowning of the triad's brother and the inability to drive. Some like Wong seem destined to improve among the Multiverse. Maybe Wai was reading upon String Theory before he wrote this.

It is a shame that this is not easily available. I have waited for years to find an affordable copy of the DVD (20 dollars or under; I would pay more if Criterion released it) or some possible rerelease but to no avail. So I had to finally take the plunge to watch this on youtube. That is not something I particularly like doing, but I wanted to watch it for a few reasons including research into Milkyway's films. I would easily buy this if it was released here in the United States. I have pretty much given up on Criterion releasing Hong Kong cinema (or even Taiwan or Mainland), but would Shout! possibly be interested in releasing a triad set? Kino?

\* While *Beyond Hypothermia* would have Milkyway's logo on it To states in Stephen Teo's monograph on To "That was shot before the company was set up. It was released after the company was established."

\*\* While the watch has three close-ups it shows two different times. In the second path it starts off as broken but at a later time with the tussle with Bo. It is telling that Bo is apologetic about it because Bo recognizes valuable items. But it is also important because Carmen Lee's character buys him a cheaper watch which he tosses aside – possibly because it is a cheaper watch and also wanting to remain seen as a tough guy. The breaking of watch allegory (trying to stop time) in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* – though Faulkner's narrative approach is much more difficult than this one which may be hard to believe unless you have read Faulkner.

\*\*\* Stephen Teo makes a crucial mistake in his book when he writes the film as *Too Many Ways To Be Number 1*. The English title is purposefully spelled to use the contraction "No." (No. 1 = no one) You might think of "Too" as two since there are two main life choices this individual has. (by Masterofoneinchpunch of KFF)

**Touch and Go (Hong Kong, 1991: Ringo Lam)** - Sammo Hung's films from the late 80s and 90s are often uneven efforts, struggling to juggle comedy, romance, and superior kung fu action, with frequent forays into the darker corners of humanity. Even his masterpieces, like *The Pedicab Driver*, suffer from this sort of identity crisis, although the quality of the action and acting often make it easier to forgive these jarring gear switches. A similar problem dogs this 1991 action drama, brought to us by director Ringo Lam. Lam is best known for his gritty, brutal crime films, like *Full Contact* and *City on Fire*. And much like Jackie Chan and Kirk Wong in *Crime Story*, we have what might be a vicious action thriller about a man who's torn between doing the right thing and saving his own hide, but the film's tendency to dip into typical Sammo Hung humor keeps it from being a better movie.

Sammo plays Fat Goose, a humble noodle maker whose sassy mother lives in an elderly home. She's eager for him to get married and have children, and Fat Goose pays his slutty neighbor to act like his girlfriend to keep his mother calm. One evening, Fat Goose witnesses a murder: a trio of thugs led by "The King of Hell" (Tommy Wong) stab a cop to death after he takes incriminating photos of important people frequenting a brothel—a brothel staffed by illegal Mainland immigrants. Fat Goose ends up fighting off the thugs and escapes.

The lead cop (Vincent Wan) on the case—whose partner was the victim—finds Fat Goose and convinces him to come on the case as an eyewitness. Initially reluctant, Fat Goose accepts the responsibility once the King of Hell tries to kill him and the cop in traffic. This makes life especially complicated for Fat Goose when he's placed in the same room as the suspect—where the heck are the one-way mirrors?—and then the suspect is released on bail by his solicitor, the weasly Mr. Kam (Lam Chung). Watching this, *Righting Wrongs*, and *Flash Point*, I can safely say that I'd never be a witness in Hong Kong. Their witness protection doesn't work for s\*\*\*.

That evening Fat Goose's home is bombarded by Molotov cocktails, forcing him to stay with the cop and his reporter sister, Angel (Teresa Mo), until the trial. At this point, Fat Goose is adamant about not testifying, although the villains don't care by this point. The situation quickly escalates as the killers target the cop's other partner, and then his sister as well. Fat Goose will quickly need to decide whether or not he'll help fight for justice or remain on the sidelines, hoping that the King of Hell will let bygones be bygones.

Like *Twin Dragons*, this is a case of the director(s)—in both cases, Ringo Lam was involved-- and the lead actor having such conflicting persona that the final result isn't a good showcase for either. This is frequently an intense film with sleazy undertones—the villains like to get public officials laid with sex-traffick victims and document those encounters with hidden cameras for blackmail purposes. People are tortured, beaten with baseball bats, stabbed,

shot, etc. A woman has her face mutilated by one of the main villains and is almost raped at another point. The King of Hell is a menacing villain, played by an actor who's even uglier than Shing Fui-On was! Surely these are the trappings of a classic—or at least solid—action thriller.

But then you have some out-of-place comic elements that don't sit well with the more serious stuff. There's an extended comic interlude where Fat Goose takes Angel to meet his mother, asking her to play the role of his girlfriend. During the visit, the mother and another lady subject Angel to all sorts of tests to determine if her body is ideal for having children! And during the climax, Sammo is given a traditional broadsword as a weapon, but ends up leaving it behind in the car. When the car eventually explodes, the weapon flies through the air and lands straight in his hands. Goofy stuff like that would be fine in a *Lucky Stars* film, but stands at odds with the rest of this movie.

On the subject of swords and explosions, the question regarding the quality of the action is an important one, since quality action can salvage an otherwise messy film. Unfortunately, there's not a lot of that in this. Former Seven Fortune Yuen Tak handles the fight scenes, and despite the quality work he did at the same time with *Saviour of the Soul* and *Shanghai Shanghai*, he seems to be at a loss as to how to balance realism and quality choreography.

Sammo Hung gets three fights, although they're all fairly brief. During the first major fight, Sammo and the detective wreck the former's apartment when he mistakes the flatfoot for an assassin. There's some painful stuntwork here, but the moves themselves feel sloppy, as if they were shooting for a more realistic match. Much later, Sammo fights off a bunch of henchmen at the villains' lair, including Billy Chow. For a minute or two, the quality of the action approaches the level of his other late 80s/early 90s movies, and Chow makes a welcome addition to the crew, even if he's just a nameless stuntman here. At the end, Sammo fends off a couple of men armed with choppers, while one of his arms is incapacitated in a sling. It's a decent fight, and Sammo finishes off one guy with a nice flying backfist. The rest of the action consists of explosions, car chases, and a fight scene involving the detective. This latter sequence is interesting, as it's set at the exact same restaurant as Jackie Chan's introductory scene in *Dragons Forever*. I recognized that place immediately.

*Touch and Go* is a mediocre entry in both Ringo Lam's and Sammo's respective filmographies. The ingredients are there, but nobody knew what exactly to do with them. If the violence had been toned down a little and the fight scenes extended more, this might sit comfortably with the likes *Panty hose Hero* and *Skinny Tiger, Fatty Dragon*. If the comedy scenes had been excised and replaced with more scenes developing the leader of the gang—the King of Hell's boss—and their hooker racket, and then upping the brutality of their comeuppance a couple of notches, then it would be more in line with Ringo's other films and make for an interesting contrast with Sammo's previous offerings. As it stands, it's an oddity mainly for die-hard fans of the star or the director. (by Blake Matthews)

**Tough Beauty and Sloppy Slop (Phillipines, 1995: Yuen Bun, Alan Chui)** - Biao and Khan go undercover to arrest drug-lord Waise Lee.

Another movie in the mile-high stack of near-zero budget Phillipino movies, *Tough Beauty* is bad. Biao's role isn't quite as great as in *Hunted Hunter*, but he's still charismatic. Khan is one of my complaints. She's an emotional void, and can't play it straight nor silly. Shots are mostly cheated, as is the norm with these films. For example, instead of showing a night club, they take a room, put some tables in it, flash some colored lights around, and cut away to random footage of a dance floor. This may be more common than you think in HK films, but usually it's done more professionally. Action-wise, this is bad as usual; multiple fight scenes that have the same weak, lifeless sound effects in other Phillipino-HK features; slow, frustrating editing that cuts to closeups at the wrong times; and generally bad fighters and choreography. Billy Chow is the only worthwhile tough guy in the whole show, having a decent bout at the end that doesn't have enough Biao involved (when he's in there, things look good). The VCD is cut for content, obviously. In the first scene a guy is about to be shot in the head, but it cuts to the man pulling the gun away and the man unmoving, plus the music CUTS to something else. Uh... and overall the movie looks as generic as they come.

Khan has a short fight against Yuen Wah. I've noticed that whenever HK fight scenes are shot in the Phillipines, the angles are going haywire trying to be too "modern." Khan's slow and weird, kicks stop mid-way it seems, and wah does almost nothing except try to get away. At one point they seemingly jump down from 30 feet high onto concrete and keep running; yea right. When it's over Wah (or someone) takes an intense fall through scaffolding.

Monsour Del Rosario (do I have to use his whole name every time I talk about this guy?) beats up a punk in a restaurant. Somehow he kicks like Donnie, snapping everything quite well. Cool wire-pull at the end too.

Another small fight where Khan saves a girl from being trapped under a fat woman in a female prison. Obviously this scene is cut; I wonder what happened after the fat lady fell on her. "Bad fighting" sums it up easily.



Yet another small fight, this one involves 2 robbers in a dark house fighting Biao and Rosario. Surprisingly, they got the lighting right, and everything's visible. Too bad it's not worth watching. Nothing cool happens, and those shots have potential! Nothing memorable happens.

Small fight in Waise Lee's house. Almost nothing again, except one shot of fighting between Biao and another guy and then Biao jump front kicking a bottle. Khan has a couple shots that look horrid, namely a cheap closeup where she slaps anything that comes her way.

Humorous, but totally unnecessary, scene in a bedroom where Biao accidentally grabs Khan's breast and they start fighting. Khan's doubled for some stuff like a fall against the wall and a kick (the only impressive shot so far), and the rest is done in near-darkness. Of course it's supposed to sound like they're getting busy on the bed, but we viewers know better!!

Lame Khan fight scene where she fights Waise Lee and then some other guy. Slomo shot while he falls through the glass. Pretty bad.

The end starts with the typical boring shootout where people run out from behind trees to be killed without giving a damn. There are a few small parts in here, like Biao fighting the muscle man, who can't do anything except throw him around (one has Biao's double fall onto coconuts, very painful looking, must have used pads). Rosario has a fight inside a bunker which fails on all levels, like when another muscleman smashes his head through wood, which produces a head-shaped hole. His kicks are awful here as well. I don't know if he took steroids for his first scene or what, but now he's a slug.

Finally Chow has his fight against Biao and Khan. A big complaint I have with this is the editor thought he could get away with cutting away from the fight to various outside shots of people being gunned down any time there's an inconsistency. Unfortunately these inserted parts last maybe 3 seconds before it cuts back, which nearly defeats the purpose. Biao gets to show off now, putting out some fine looking kicks. Chow does good kicking as expected, and while fighting Biao, things are great (except one shot where they just stand exchanging punches, looks awful). When Biao is stabbed, Khan takes over, gets kicked around, gets knocked down, and Rosario takes over. He's stiff, except for one shot where he chain kicks in one spot!! .. ?!?! Did they use a double, or is this guy just TOTALLY inconsistent? Doesn't matter, Chow is stabbed with a piece of bamboo, and it's over.

Another bad Filipino movie. ... yep, another one. Um, I guess the Chow fight was ok at the end, some of the best action in a Filipino movie I've ever seen!! (if that means anything) I won't ask "WHY?!?! OH WHY?!?!!" because I know: it's cheap, and can be done in a short time. What amazes me is it's choreographed by Alan Chui, who I BELIEVE also choreographed *The Loot*. Incredible how a regional change like this can spoil everything. It could instead be that this is 1995, not 1980, so Alan Chui may just suck now. Who knows. But at least Biao wasn't making porno, and neither was Billy Ch... oh wait, forget I said that. (by Eric Jacobus of The Stunt People)

**Tough Guy (Hong Kong, 1997: Ka Ka)** - Pan (Chen Zhan Peng, who played Bond from *Shanghai Affairs*) is on a case where stolen diamonds are being traded between Billy Chow and a guy named Chi. Chinny (Guang) is a cop with Peng, but is also in the business with Chow. To make matters worse for Pan, he has a virus that will kill him.

This movie reminds me of *Shanghai Affairs* in a way because it has both Chen Peng and Guang, and also because it doesn't seem to be a BIG movie, epic, like the *Once Upon a Time in China* series. It's easy to digest, which can be a good thing if provided with a good atmosphere and characters. This one, well, it has some emotional parts, and some action parts (which will be the focus), and it's not an entirely bad package for something I just found and never knew existed, really. The mood is hampered with the colors, like *Iron Monkey 2*, where there is blue and red and green and all sorts of weird colors that are used like affirmative action or something.

Things start off with Guang beating someone up, but there are too many cuts and nothing really special happens except Guang sweeps the guy, who flies into the air, and Guang does a front thrust kick on him. Let me mention that Guang didn't dress extremely well here (my opinion), wearing black and white checkered pants and coat, with a blue shirt. Well, it's interesting I guess.

The next batch of fights are between Billy Chow and Chen Peng, and they're not so bad. Chow overpowers Peng all the time, as I would expect. Their punches look good, and the kicks are good too, and at one point Chen Peng busts out some fast punches and Chow, well, doesn't have much trouble laying him out again. But there really isn't much of it. Guang gets in a small fight with Chow with some clothes grabbing, nothing great, and then Guang fights with Chen Peng and something happens. Guang all of a sudden gets chubby, his hair gets long, and his ass gets stuffed

with a turkey, not to mention he shrinks by 8 inches. They doubled him with some guy who's pretty good, yea, but he doesn't look anything like Yu Rong Guang. AT LEAST they could have cut the guy's hair. Why did they do this? He does simple stuff that Guang does. I want to know these things. Did the choreography not work with Chen Peng and Guang's heights? Did they have to shrink Guang just for a small piece of choreography, and show the double's face the whole time?

Oh well. Guang and Chow fight again, and they put the first part of the fight (like 30 moves) in slow motion... wait a second, is this good? Remember in *Tai Chi 2* when I mentioned that the fight in slow motion was actually very well done? (If not, then I didn't put it in, but anyways, I stand correct). Here, it's just as effective. The two of them look good in slow motion. Chow uses his waist to do his hits, while Guang has this incredible ability to throw a flurry of punches with just his shoulders, and still facing in the same direction he started in. Very cool looking. A few drops to the ground, Guang gets pissed, oh it's cool. Guang also does a good looking low forward jumping toe kick that is blocked, Chow throws 4 great looking kicks. Nice thing about slow motion is you can go into real detail about all the hits. After that it goes back to regular speed. Guang, again, turns into a double when his back is turned. This is annoying but doesn't happen for the whole fight. This double, though, does a picture perfect single HK spin to avoid a kick, and it looks wire assisted but for some reason it just looked too good to be on wires. Some more punches, and then they stop.

The last fight between Guang and Chen Peng is in slow motion too, but it's that *Mr. Nice Guy* slow motion, where they film in 30 fps but just put spaces between the frames. That's bad, bad because they had some good motion going on there and it was pretty well wasted. I mean, you can see what's happening, but now how you're supposed to see it. Guang does some good kicks, Chen Peng gets beaten up, and his wife comes and stops the fight.

I think that there needed to be more action, different colors, and stop that crap slow motion at the end (again, regular slow motion is good, just not the jerky kind). Besides that, I was pretty satisfied with what was there. Oh and ditch the double for Guang. If he doesn't work with the choreography, CHANGE THE CHOREOGRAPHY. (by Eric Jacobus of the Stunt People)

**Tragic Fantasy: Tiger of Wanchai (Hong Kong, 1994: Stephen Lo, Joe Chu)** - A couple of weeks ago, I finally checked out -- and was blown away by -- the brooding offering entitled *To Live and Die in Tsim Sha Tsui*. When I told a fellow Hong Kong movie fan about this, he said something to the effect of "considering the large number of Triad films that you've already seen, it's amazing that there are still some that can get your blood going!" After having viewed another Triad drama that was released -- like that Andrew Lau helmed effort in which Jacky Cheung turned in a surprisingly effective performance -- in 1994 (and actually ended up 13 rungs above it by getting in at no. 31 on that year's Hong Kong box office list), I'd have to agree with my friend that many of this once popular genre's works can seem too similar and thus not feel like they are bringing anything "new" to the table.

Perhaps the core story of *THE TRAGIC FANTASY: TIGER OF WANCHAI* would not have felt so old if I hadn't viewed the later made *Young and Dangerous* series of films before that whose protagonist is an apparently "based on real life" character who went from being a lowly "parking boy" to a powerful gangster whose life remained in constant danger due to his having as many, if not more, disgruntled rivals than true friends. As things turned out, it was interesting -- plus hard to not notice -- that three out of this effort's four main actors also do feature in that Triad glamorizing group of cinematic works which made a major star out of the oft-criticized Ekin Cheng. At the same time, it was somewhat fascinating too to see Lau Ching Wan having the quite atypical -- for him -- (supporting) role of a gambling addict with a cowardly streak along with good buddies (who came in the form of Simon Yam, Vincent Wan and Roy Cheung).

By some accounts, any movie that can boast having Mr. Lau -- never mind other fine actors -- in its cast should be more than a run of the mill one. In this case though, my feeling is that many of the talents who appeared in *THE TRAGIC FANTASY: TIGER OF WANCHAI* ended up getting let down by the admittedly eventful, but ultimately far too predictable, offering's uninspired script. In particular, this (re)viewer rues its screenwriting trio's decision to rather abruptly shift the focus of the main story fairly early on in this Steven Lo and Joseph Chi co-directed work from one that gave equal attention to the four "heng tai" named Hing, Dee, Hung and Chung -- and thus benefited from having more than one talented individual being asked to carry (that portion of) the film -- to that which gave center-stage pretty much entirely to Simon Yam's highly temperamental Hing character.

Not far behind on my "wrong turn" list would be that which sought to throw some love and sex elements into the Category III rated -- for violence? -- picture by having Hing get involved with an arguably feisty female called Mil Mil (played by Marianne Chan) and a fallen woman named Kitty (essayed by Yvonne Yung Hung). It's a pity too that veteran actor Lo Lieh's snake-ish (Elder) Brother Kui character and also Ben Lam's bombastic (elder) Brother Yeung

ended up not getting more screen time than they did (even while both “dai lo”s were able to amply show how heartless -- and deserving of violent deaths -- they were in their temporally limited appearances in the film). Still, these individuals did have a greater impact on the proceedings of that whose Chinese title translates into English as “The Drunken Death Dream of the Wanchai Tiger” than the almost entirely superfluous character portrayed by the actress who looked to have also been the watchable but not special movie’s executive producer (Charine Chan’s Fannie invariably played second fiddle to characters who already were but support ones vis a vis this offering’s principal personality).

All in all, about the one thing that I found somewhat “novel” about the not very sophisticated -- and particularly with regards to its use of Cantopop montages -- *THE TRAGIC FANTASY: TIGER OF WANCHAI* were its fight scenes. Not only did these well-choreographed portions of the movie benefit from the likes of Ben Lam figuring in them but they also are not filmed in the blurry, “shaky-cam” and “jump cut” style made famous by Wong Kar Wai and popularized by cinematographer-director Andrew Lau and others. Ironically, this probably is really because this Peter Ngor Chi Kwan lensed as well as executive directed work -- which came out in the same year as *Chungking Express* and *Ashes of Time*, and was a bigger commercial hit than either of those critically acclaimed efforts -- was made before that latterly much imitated cinematographic style became the vogue. (by YTSL of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Tragic Hero (Hong Kong, 1987: Taylor Wong) – aka Rich and Famous II; Hero; Heroic Hero; Black Vengeance** - “Ying hung ho hon” (1987) is the sequel to “Gong woo ching” and has been variously billed “Rich and Famous II”, “Hero,” “Heroic Hero”(!), “Black Vengeance,” and is currently available on DVD in the US as “Tragic Hero.” Though it would seem to me to make considerably less sense viewed before “Gong woo ching,” the sequel was released first in Hong Kong.

The box for the first movie shows only Chow Yun-Fat on the cover and he had top billing, though the protagonist of the movie was the fourth-billed Andy Lau. I’m not sure which of them is the “tragic hero” of the sequel in that the wives and children of both are blown up together and neither can live in peace and prosperity. (Chow’s character, Chai, was already rich when first seen in the first movie, but not famous; the boys raised together played by Lau (Chai) and Alex Man (Yung) are well off at the start of the sequel.

Chai was twice persuaded against his better judgment to spare the life of the malevolent Yung in the first movie. Yung remains resentful of Chai’s ease and of Chai’s appreciation of his adoptive brother’s loyalty. Though Yung is ruthless and duplicitous, it is difficult to imagine him building an organization to rival the reconciled triad bosses (Chai and Lo-Tai (Chun Hiang-Ko)) or to outmaneuver Chai in using corrupt police. And Chow’s triad boss seems too kindly (if not too cool) to operate at the top echelon of organized crime in Hong Kong (or anywhere else). He has mostly gone straight and his underlings have lost their violent edge.

Moreover, his most competent and loyal lieutenant, Kwok (Andy Lau) has gone off to Malaysia, married a local Malay woman, adopted more than a dozen kids and is running a restaurant. Yung taunts Chai at being old and no longer able to cut it (various “its”) and stages a coup against his supposed boss and then an all-out attack on Chai, after a visit from Kwok pleading with him not to attack Chai.

There is a lot more gunplay in the second movie, and a Götterdämmerung inferno in the John Woo manner with rocket launchers to finish off the saga (as well as a big explosion in Malaysia arranged by Hung).

I again enjoy seeing Lau playing the loyal and modest youth. Though looking the part of a suave businessman, Chow Yun-Fat seems too good to be true (to be a triad boss) and Alex Man is very good at conveying malevolence (though, as already noted, this makes me wonder why anyone would follow him...) Carina Lau as Chai’s wife Po Yee and Pauline Wong as Hung’s (biological) sister and Chai’s housekeeper have more to do in the sequel, including the former fighting off a jailhouse rape by Hung and the latter arranging Chai’s escape from the police.

I don’t find explosions in movies very interesting and have difficulty suspending disbelief that characters in either Hong Kong or Hollywood movies survive hails of bullets (the marksmanship is better in these two movies than in those of Johnnie To and many others, but are remarkably ineffective, and it seems to take at least twenty direct hits for the bullets to be lethal).

I found *Rich and Famous* fairly engaging, but was bored by *Tragic Hero*. The lack of Alan Tam (a better fit to the label “tragic hero” than either Chai and Kwok, who died at the end of “Rich and Famous”) is certainly a factor. And Yung is so thoroughly evil as to be grotesque without being entertaining (as the psychotic played by James Cagney in *White Heat*, to take one example, was).

The images of the transfer (and/or the source material transferred) for *Tragic Hero* are better than those of *Rich and Famous*. Joseph Chan Wing-leung's music helps drive the action very effectively.

Both movies offer Cantonese, Mandarin, or Spanish (!) audio. Even the Cantonese seems dubbed; the Mandarin and Spanish certainly are. The English subtitles are intelligible if not always grammatical (and visible). There are some trailers (though not for the movie itself) and talent files for the top-billed actors (including Danny Lee as the stolid cop determined through both movies to arrest Chai for something).

It is definitely better to begin at the beginning (with *Rich and Famous*). If it stimulates enough interest in the characters to go one to the fairly predictable reckonings, as it did me, *Tragic Hero* still might disappoint (as it did me). (by Stephen O. Murray of Epinions.com)

**Treasure Hunt (Hong Kong, 1994: Jeff Lau)** - Asian cinema is notorious for its genre-blending, but usually the oddball mix works in a movie's favor. Rarely does it result in something as sloppy and weak as "Treasure Hunt," the 1994 action/adventure/romance/fantasy/comedy from writer/director Jeff Lau. It's a shame to see a star as wonderful as Chow Yun-Fat stuck in such an uninviting mess - but then, if Chow can't help the film, then you know it's in trouble.

The problems abound right from the start, when we learn that Chow's character, an American CIA agent undercover in China, has been assigned to locate a missing "national treasure," the identity of which neither he or we know. How vague can this movie get? "Go find us... something." Gee, thanks.

His mission takes him to a Shaolin temple, where he takes up residence while poking around for the generic whatever. While there, he makes friends with the tubby junior monk (he gives him a Game Boy!) and the crotchety older monks (he teaches them baseball!). Most of these scenes exist for cheap slapstick effect; had someone been hit in the crotch while a "booooooinnnng!!" sound effect played on the soundtrack, I'd have not been surprised.

While not goofing off with the monks, Chow's busy wooing a mysterious woman (Jacqueline Wu Chien-Lien) who's being held prisoner by the monks, apparently because she has mystical powers. For instance, she can make our hero's ears grow all big and floppy, because this is what passes for hilarious in this film. It's supposed to be a sweet romantic fantasy, with scenes like the one where she helps him almost-fly (it's more like giant jumps) intended to infuse a warmth and charm to the proceedings.

It almost clicks, thanks to the charisma of Chow and Wu Chien-Lien. These are two stars that can get us watching anything, and they add a natural feel to the characters that makes a few scenes actually work on their own.

And who knows, maybe it might have worked had Lau not opted to make his movie a little of everything, to the point where the fight sequences and gunplay - two things you'd expect from a Chow Yun-Fat actioner - simply don't fit at all. Should a cute romance have scenes of Chow and his costars shooting people between the eyes? Or, if you want to go the other way around, should an action movie about secret agents and Shaolin warriors have scenes of sweet courtship? Should either of these movies have so much limp slapstick in them? And should such a lighthearted movie stop dead in its tracks in order to give us some melodrama about how the tubby junior monk gets brutally whipped for breaking a rule? Talk about a buzzkill.

In trying to be twenty movies in one, Lau never manages to make any one of them very good. Even the showdown between martial arts legends Phillip Kwok and Gordon Liu (a potential match-up for the ages in the kung fu world) turns into a letdown, with both stars reduced to cheap comedy and a fight sequence completely lacking in thrills. "Treasure Hunt" (also known as "American Shaolin") is a movie that wastes too many opportunities, winding up little more than a garbled mess and a disappointment for fans of everyone involved. (by David Cornelius of DVD Talk)

**Triad Story (Hong Kong, 1990: Shum Wai) - aka The Last Brother** - It's got Stephen Chiau & Ng Man Tat on the front of the vcd, but don't let this mislead you into thinking it's a comedy... melodrama all the way, baby!

Chiau's role is quite small here - Tat's part is actually bigger (and bizarrely includes him doing an action scene!). Bigger parts are had by O Shun Hung as Chiau's father, a former Dai Lo just out of jail after 20 years, and Wu Ma and Shing Fui On as two of his former Triad boys.

The basic driving force of the movie is the young triads having no sense of respect or decency, and the old Triads coming together again to try and teach them a lesson. It's kind of an old man movie by and large... though they evidently realised that Wu Ma & Ng Man Tat weren't really adequate matches for the young Triad kids in a fight, so Billy Chow gets brought in to kick some ass.

That final fight deserves special mention - a great brutal fight, with some bone crunching stunt work. There's a few other action moments in the movie too, but not in the same league... though it is rather special seeing Ng Man Tat go psycho with an axe :)

Overall verdict - the movie is pretty enjoyable, but not in any way a classic. (by MrBooth of HKMDB)

**Triads: The Inside Story (Hong Kong, 1989: Taylor Wong)** - Just as bad, if not a little better, was the 1989 Chow Yun-Fat film *Triads: The Inside Story*. Despite the title and Chow Yun-Fat's fame for his bullet ballet films like the A Better Tomorrow films and Flaming Brothers, there's no two-fisted gunplay and heroic bloodshed to be seen here. That shouldn't be a problem in itself, but HK cinephiles expecting to see Chow do anything interesting at all will be sorely disappointed. The only action Chow sees is crashing a truck into a car at the very end. The rest of the action is made up of group battles involving choppers and blunt objects like hammers and metal bars, with the most impressive performance going to Michael Chan. There are some decent stunts, like Chan jumping from a window and onto a scaffolding, and then off the scaffolding to tackle an opponent. Also, there are at least two scenes in which someone running is broadsided by a moving car, which has got to hurt. Unfortunately, a dead script and the lack of a good climax, plus Chow Yun-Fat being removed from the action, just kills the film dead. (by Blake Matthews)

**Trouble Maker (Taiwan, 1995: Kevin Chu Yen-Ping)** - This movie is very silly, but being too judgmental might impair your senses to see how good of a silly movie this one actually is. There's quite a few cool Hong Kong super stars in this movie also, even though it would have been better if they showed more of heartthrob Takeshi Kaneshiro. The concept of obtaining martial arts lessons from the Shaolin Temple to deal with the troublesome student super pranksters was quite interesting & inspiring in some ways of never giving up, until you prove yourself. Takeshi Kaneshiro plays one of the popular prankster students, but is sexy & charming as always. This movie is somewhat the comedy martial arts version of the American "Substitute" movies. But I still enjoyed watching it, though. (by Maxxk24 of IMDB)

**Twin Dragons (Hong Kong, 1992: Tsui Hark, Ringo Lam)** - Rather like 'Thunderbolt' & 'Miracles', this movie has been sat in my unwatched pile of Jackie Chan DVD's for several years, but after recently viewing the previously mentioned efforts, and finding them to be surprisingly enjoyable, I decided to finally give 'Twin Dragons' a go as well.

It's a strange hybrid of a movie, actually made as a benefit for the HK Directors Guild, it was handed to Tsui Hark & Ringo Lam to direct, with a whole bunch of action directors on board, from Yuen Woo Ping to Tony Leung Siu Hung. Due to this connection, there's also a whole bunch of directors playing cameo parts in the movie - from schlock meister Wong Jing & Shaw Brothers legend Lau Kar Leung appearing in the same scene, to John Woo as a priest, to Eric Tsang simply billed as 'man on the phone', all be it one talking about bestiality. Even Hark & Lam are in there as card playing car mechanics.

However as a Chan vehicle, it's definitely quite unique. In '92 Chan had his comedic persona as the underdog with a heart of gold firmly in place, so it's a little strange to see him taking Nina Li to bed, then lighting up a smoke straight after they've done the deed and playing it cold & collected! Likewise goes for the scene where he tries to mow down the bad guys in a hail of bullets.

The combination of Hark's quirkiness, Lam's gritty violence, and Chan's comedy sometimes seem to gel together, and other times do anything but. Perhaps the best example of the latter is in the final action scene, where Chan gets to take on a bunch of bad guys in a car testing center. We have Chan performing some great feats of physicality and choreography, combined with some truly grating twins based comedy revolving around midget Teddy Robin Kwan, topped off with a car crash which cheerfully announces the main villain of the piece to be dead. For a Chan movie, it sometimes feels a little awkward to watch.

While there are no particular stand-out one-on-one fight sequences, despite the presence of Shaw Brothers bad guy Wang Lung Wei, the fight scenes which are there tend to be a little bit more hard-hitting than Chan's usual comedic style. There's also some good vehicle stunt work thrown in, with an exciting boat chase, and also another chase sequence involving a prison bus literally getting smashed to pieces as it tries to escape the cops.

*Twin Dragons* is a Chan movie I probably won't watch again, the tone for me was too wildly uneven, which is par of the course for most Hong Kong movies from that era, but it just seemed to stand out more in this one, perhaps because we know who's involved. What are other peoples thought on this one? (by Paul Bramhall)

**Twinkle, Twinkle, Lucky Stars (Hong Kong, 1985: Sammo Hung)** - A police informant sent a letter containing sensitive information on an illegal drug operation to his friend, Yi-Ching. While on vacation in Thailand, the informant is assassinated by the drug lord's henchmen and, to cover-up their operation, they attempt to eliminate Yi-Ching and double-agent Lau. Back in Hong Kong, police detectives Muscles and Ricky Fung are assigned to protect Lau and Inspector Barbara Woo is assigned to protect Yi-Ching. She takes her to the hideout of the "Five Lucky Stars" and also enlists their help in bringing down the drug operation.

Jackie Chan, Yuen Biao, and Andy Lau as Police Officers wearing tank tops arresting a bunch of drug smugglers? Now you've got my attention! Unfortunately that's still only a minor part of the movie. Rest is the same My Lucky Stars nonsense we've seen before, except now it's Rosamund Kwan's turn to shatter her teeth right off from the cringe. The toilet scene with Yasuaki Kurata was hilarious though. Still, it overall works better a bit than the previous installment.

I love how Sibelle Hu looks ready to kick someone's ass in just about every scene in this movie. She's seen so much shit in the previous movie, that's perfectly understandable!

So the first fight we have is the warehouse throwdown with Jackie, Yuen, and Andy as mentioned above. This scene is genius! Instant martial arts classic that's for sure, with another lovely appearance by Dick Wei, the unsung heroes of martial arts movies. Always there to take the hits and fight back, never there to lead a movie. Not only are the choreography and stunts spectacular but the fight itself is tense and filled with small funny moments like the guns and the gas tanks.

Next up is the fight at the Thailand beach house, an overall good fight as well where Sammo Hung and Sibelle Hu take on some ladyboys / actual ladies? Whatever, it's got some stunts that gotta hurt as usual and the overall feel is quite funny.

Meanwhile Jackie Chan runs after Richard Norton but gets his ass kicked.

At some point during the movie Sammo Hung fights Michelle Yeoh briefly (cameo!), that was fun! On that subject, I can't figure out the timeline here? Apparently Michelle Yeoh was cast in *Yes, Madam!* following this cameo, but *Twinkle Twinkle, Lucky Stars* came out in August 1985 while *Yes, Madam!* came out in November 1985. How is that even possible? Did they really write, cast, shoot, edit, then release a movie in 3 months?

Anyway, Yuen Biao has a few brief skirmishes until the end but next up is the final fight between Sammo Hung, Yuen Biao, Jackie Chan, Dick Wei, Fat Chung, and Richard Norton, and what a fight as well! *Twinkle, Twinkle, Lucky Stars* never fails to deliver on those amazing fights, and this one is legendary (as is the warehouse fight earlier). Tennis rackets, humor, great kicks, Jackie Chan fighting with furniture, name it.

And the ending where the elevator door opens and like 100 people come pouring out, what the hell? Loved that.

Stunts - 93/100 | After watching a bunch of their movies, I can't even tell anymore which one is the most amazing between Yuen Biao and Jackie Chan. I'd still have to give it to Jackie Chan because of *Police Story* but damnnnnnnnn Yuen, son, that's some good shit right there.

Narrative - 43/100 | 1% better than *My Lucky Stars*. Approximately.

Fight Choreography - 95/100 | When Sammo Hung takes out a pair of tennis rackets and starts flipping them around I just straight up lost it. Truly epic. The warehouse fight near the middle also requires an immediate second-viewing because reasons.

Enjoyment - 66/100 | I had more fun with this one than *My Lucky Stars*, but that's solely because the non-creinge scenes are slightly less bothersome. And more Jackie Chan, which is always good. Still as tonally inconsistent as every other Sammo Hung movie though.

Watch it for the fights, which are among the best I've seen. And that Michelle Yeoh cameo!

Curious to see how my opinion of these Lucky Stars movies holds up after rewatches. By the way, on the subject of Sibelle Hu, anyone got good movies with her to recommend? I loved her intensity in this one. (by Daxtreme of KFF)

**2000 A.D. (Hong Kong, 1999: Gordon Chan)** - Peter Li (AK) has an older brother named Greg who, unbeknownst to him, is actually a CIA. A rogue CIA operative wants a computer program Greg has that is capable of completely shutting down the Internet. When Greg is killed, Peter vows to stop at nothing to clear his name and find the killer, an adventure that leads him from Hong Kong to Singapore.

Fight #1 --- Peter vs the assassin (KL) - It's a brief skirmish, more of a brawl really. There's a kick or two, but mainly it's brutal with some good falls.

Fight #2 --- Peter & Benny vs Eric Ong, a Singapore cop - Very short, but has a little HK style action to the choreography. There's a few more kicks, and the flow is good, but right as it picks up, it's over.

Fight #3 --- Peter & Eric vs Kelvin - Now here's some decent MA. Good fight! The editing is full of quick cuts, and the flow is not all that great because of it, but there are some good blows with impact and lots of kicks.

A couple of forum members had clued me in that this was not an MA heavy flick, and they were correct. However, it is rife with action. There's some good shootouts to be found, though one camera shot shows the bad guys shooting at the good guys from, like, 6 feet away with automatic weapons. (Should've rethought that one.) So if you're in it for some action, you'll get your money's worth. (I bought this used for \$3 so I'm good with it.)

The acting's good. The comedy lines are kind of lame, but the drama is passable. As the movie is 15 yrs old, you kind have to suspend your belief in the plot, but it works.

Can't say I was really excited while watching it, but I'm not disappointed either. Would I watch it again? Doubtful. Would I skim it for the fights? Probably...maybe...we'll see.

I like Aaron Kwok. I think he's a good screen fighter, but *China Strike Force* (a film I love) this ain't, I have yet to find another action film of his I really like. (Of course I've only seen maybe 2 other others, but I couldn't tell you their names, so obviously I didn't care for them. I'm open to suggestions.)

I don't feel like I got burned on this one, but by the same token, I don't feel like I got lucky either. I think it's worth seeing, but I wouldn't kill myself looking for it. It's your call. (by Scott Blasingame)

**Ultimate Revenge (Phillipines, 1995: Ridley Tsui)** - I thought I saw low-budget films...but this flick makes even LETHAL PANTHER 2 look like it had a mega-budget! Picture this: for some scenes in ULTIMATE REVENGE -- and I'm absolutely NOT kidding -- protagonists and antagonists played at shooting at each other, clearly not firing blank rounds, letting the sound effects do the work! Suspension of disbelief is one thing, but come on! Editing? You WISH it was good!

Good news: the filmmakers must have saved their money to waste a ton of blanks in the rollicking... \*yawn\* Zzzzz...whup! Bad news: sorry, nothing that special about the finale, either! The story ain't so good, either..."ultimate" revenge, my foot! "Same old" revenge is more like it, the same as you'd find in any low-budget actioner, East or West!

In this case it's the Phillipines, lowball film capitol of the planet. There are bright spots in this film, but they're trapped in the ho-hum air of the overall movie. Those brightest spots are Lily Li (not the same actress of the Shaw Brothers classics, but a striking actress I've never seen before this film...if she's seen this film, I doubt she'd want to do another one!), Cynthia Khan and Kim Maree Penn. But where such actresses pull a film up with their performances, this flick just drags them down and it's a shame. Cynthia's part as a police madam (again!) is little more than an extended cameo, and Kim only gets a little more screen time -- but not by much -- as the right hand villainess of Ronnie Ricketts. By the way, Ronnie chews the scenery even more than he did in LETHAL PANTHER 2

and *HARD TO KILL* aka *INTERPOL CONNECTION*, but you can tell even he must be thinking: "Somebody, get me out of this!" Kim and Cynthia square off in the finale, one of the few good things to happen, but it's executed so bad what should have been a high-octane fight turns into a lost cause that doesn't even last two minutes.

Ugh! Somebody should save Cynthia Khan...not from organized crime bad boys, but from bad movies like this! (by CaptainAmerica of HKMDB)

**Ultracop 2000 (Philippines, 1993: Philip Ko Fei)** - Although Yukari has a lot of screen time in this Philippino action comedy directed by Philip Ko, it's mostly wasted. Zorbak is a cheesy alien who is pursued by a Martian cop to Earth. When Philip Ko's cop character Benny is wounded in a shootout with the Black Dragon Gang, his colleague Lux (Yukari) seeks to investigate the alien who appeared at the same time. She eventually breaks the case using Ador, a suicidal gay man with AIDS, to attract Zorbak, who derives energy from his victims. Viewers should expect a high quotient of very unamusing, homophobic gags - although some of this prejudice is actually directed toward Lux for associating with someone with AIDS.

The action is incomprehensible and ridiculous. The police eventually move in to arrest two gangs in a separate action thread. The shootout is not worth waiting for. Zorbak arrives, prompting the final confrontation with more homophobic sight gags. The most positive thing about this movie (perhaps the only positive note) is Yukari herself, who looks fabulous in black futuristic police garb complete with combat boots, body armor and sporting a sawed off shotgun in a quick draw hip rig. One of her poses in the hospital corridor after Benny has been shot has her trademark facial expression that could blister paint from the wall. Unfortunately, that's all there is. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Unbeatables (Hong Kong, 2000: Lam Ang-Hang)** - Lets get to the good news first regarding this film. A tired looking Pinky Cheung gets to go to the Philippines where hopefully she was able to get some pool time and have herself a mini-vacation. Two actors who I haven't seen in a new film for ages decide to show up here. Hopefully, they also needed some down time in the Philippines as well. Fan Siu Wong was in two famous cult films during the nineties - *The Story of Ricky* and *Stone Age Warriors*. In both of these he showed a fairly impressive physique along with some good martial arts moves. But he sort of dropped out of films and has primarily done television for the past few years. Well he is back. Another actor to drop out of the film scene for a while isooky faced Lily Chung (*Red to Kill* and *Daughter of Darkness*). The good news regarding her is that she makes it through this film without being raped, molested or beaten up! It is good to see her stretching her thespian skills and surviving a film.

I am not sure if you would consider this good news or bad news - but after viewing this in its entirety I feel all too intimate with each and every pore of Roy Cheung's face. The director (who I won't name to protect the innocent) has a fetish for microscopic close-ups and without the budget for either good lighting or make-up we are privileged to see every sweaty blotch on every actor's face. At one point a whitehead pops up on his chin like a President on Mt. Rushmore and all I could do was focus on it - and wonder if anyone was ever going to mention it to him. Not a chance.

On a scenic tour of Manila, Fan takes Roy's sister to the infamous trash dump and tells her how sad it is to see people pick their way through the garbage in hopes of finding something of value to sell. Lets say if they had come upon this film, they would have left it right where it lay - stinking up the place. The fact that this film was even made is somewhat sad, but that it got transferred to the DVD format before all the great films still patiently waiting is criminal. What is going on - open up an investigation - serve some warrants - have some lunch - say a prayer.

The film opens promisingly with Fan Siu Wong in jail ala Ricky and a hulking creature wants to put him in his own private petting zoo - but a few kicks later Fan is out of jail and in the employ of Mr. Li. Mr. Li is a triad intent on taking over Chinatown in Manila and thinks that Fan and his partner Roy can help him do this. Now the problem is that Fan and Roy go by the names of Shiny and Flames. Unless you were opening an art deco retro disco, would you hire two guys called Shiny and Flames to help you out? Mr. Li does much to his regret. Roy gets one gander at Li's wife, Pinky (also her character's name), and decides he wants her like a delicious turkey sandwich the day after Christmas. The fact that Pinky spends the entire film inebriated or with her nose buried in 3 inches of "snow" doesn't seem to bother him.



It is only a matter of time until Mr. Li is out of the way - Pinky merely sniffs at the news of his demise - and lovingly looks at Roy like a silver straw waiting to be inhaled. Of course as Shakespeare observed - perhaps more discernibly than here - that the crown does not always rest easy on the head of a king - nor does a Pinky Shakespeare should have added. Billy Chow is a Philippino general and he has a fight with Fan Siu Wong - which in theory could have made the film perhaps worth watching - but they use the same quick editing style that is used with non-action stars to make it look as if they have any idea what they are doing. These guys do though and it's a real shame that they didn't allow them to have some fun. The only thing to keep its integrity in this film was unfortunately Roy's whitehead. To be avoided like a dentist with the shakes. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Undefeatable (Hong Kong/USA, 1994: Godfrey Ho) – aka Bloody Mary Killer** - Street fighter Kristi Jones(Cynthia Rothrock), fights illegally, so she can support her sister through college. When her sister becomes the next victim of a sinister & crazed Martial Arts killer, known as Stingray. She must set out on a path of revenge, teaming up with a local cop and Martial Arts expert called Nick DeMarco(John Miller).

*"I don't know who you are buddy, but I'm gonna kick your ass"*

Godfrey Ho re-unites Honor & Glory cast members Cynthia Rothrock, John Miller and Donna Jason, for more Martial Arts mayhem. In fact, most of the cast of H&R, come back to play minor roles here. Released in Hong Kong under the title Bloody Mary Killer, with the addition of Robin Shou among the cast. Sadly, Shou doesn't appear in the U.S print of the film, which is the version I watched for this review. Actress Donna Jason's Martial Arts, teacher Master Tai Yim, who wrote the story for this production, returns as the movies fight co-fight choreographer. He doesn't have an acting role in the movie however. Undefeatable comes with a big cult following, thanks to the final fight getting over a million hits, on the video site YouTube, back in 2006. Of the two movies Godfrey Ho made in the U.S in 1993, this is the lesser of the two, with a colder and meaner edge to it. Mostly thanks to the serial killer story that tries to hold the movie together. It could have easily been John Miller's over the top villain in Honor and Glory, that attracted a lot of hits on the internet. Or a performance from any number of low budget movies, that were being made around this time. That's not taking anything away from Don Niam's performance, he was clearly a powerful and talented Martial Artist.

The movie opens with Anna(Emille Davasac) talking to her Psychiatrist Jennifer Simmons(Donna Jason), about her now abusive husband. Intercut with a well-staged Martial Arts throw-down, taking place in a boxing ring. Where Martial Artist Don Niam gets to show off his skills. Anna's husband has become fixated with competing in illegal fights, only his violent ways in the ring, have been spilling into their home life. This being a Godfrey Ho movie, means this serious subject is either presented as vicious and nasty, or its done in such an over the top manor, it becomes awkwardly comical. It's a strange mix, and one of the reasons I prefer Honor and Glory over this title. That said, there's some solid looking Martial Arts on display, and it's heavily influenced by the Hong Kong action of the mid-90's. Which is always nice to see, in a movie filmed in the U.S pre to the Matrix and The Raid.

*"Hello Anna, Anna you are coming with me"*  
*"You are crazy, my name's not Anna"*

Don Niam's delusional monotone mullet loving character Sting Ray, certainly leaves a big impression on the viewer. Mis-treated and abandoned as a child, when his wife eventually leaves him, it triggers a major psychotic episode. Causing him to loose-complete touch with reality. Wondering the streets and calling random women by his wife's name, Anna. Switching from being reserved and polite, to an eye gouging maniac within seconds. According to Niam's appearance on the KFMG Pod-Cast, Godfrey Ho picked him to appear in the film. Ho was touring the West coast of America, attending Martial Arts shows, in the hope of finding some fresh screen talent. It was Ho who was behind the over the top characteristics of the character Sting Ray. In one random moment, a leery Sting Ray throws ice at a kissing couple in a car parking lot. At first it appears he's picked on the wrong couple, when the man stands up to him in a fighting pose. The guy throws some nice kicks, but he's soon over powered by the mullety madman. The scuffle ends, with an eye watering bump from the second story of the carp park, onto a vehicle below. When two cops find the body, one of them tells his partner, that the guy on the floor is Sunny King. Only for the other cop to say, what Sunny King the Karate Champion?. It's one of those movies, where even the postman knows some style of Kung Fu. Not that there is a Kung Fu postman in the film.

*"Dr, I've got a psycho piling up bodies with no eyes, if you know something, tell me"*

Like many people of his generation, Niam was introduced to Martial Arts through the Warner Brother produced Kung Fu T.V series. Despite having no screen fighting experience, other than a minor role in the Don Wilson PM

entertainment actioner *Out for Blood*. He handles the fight scenes here very well, even more impressive when you know they barely had any rehearsals pre-to filming them. It might be the lack of rehearsal, that gives the films fight scenes a unique look to them. An approach that Godfrey Ho and his team brought over from Hong Kong. Perhaps over rehearsing an action scene, will have a detrimental effect on it?, which is just as bad as no rehearsal at all?. According to the movies IMDB page, Don Niam studied Hung Fat Kung Fu under Grandmaster Tai Yim. Don had known Tai pre-to this production getting made. According to his official site, he found Tai Yim, after one of his teachers passed away. In the movie, he is supposed to be using a variation on the Dragon's Claw, leaving his victims with their eyes torn out. When Sting Ray crooked fight promoter, snoops around his creepy ware house lair, he makes a grisly and random discovery.

*"Why would Sting Ray, have a fish tank with eyeballs in it?"*

While I could devote a whole review to Don Niam's character, there are other cast members I need to talk about. The Lady Dragon Cynthia Rothrock, ditches her trade mark blond hair, for a feisty red head look. She's a mean little ass-kicker called Kristi Jones. The woman with the crimson lipstick, takes part in illegal gang fights. Not to mention working as a waitress, when she's not hitting people with her fists and feet. Top Martial Artist Chuck Jeffreys (Honor & Glory), returns for a brief role as one of Kristi opponents. It's a good scuffle, but it would have been nice to see more of Jeffreys skills in the movie. He deserved to be more than just a throw away fighter, at the start of the film. Getting back to Miss Rothrock, she's on top form here, and certainly looks good in a pair of clingy lycra trousers. She's doubled for some scenes, by a guy in a wig, who isn't as successful at pulling off the tight lycra look. That's said, the lady pulls off some nice moves of her own, even when her arm is in a sling. Which I'll talk more about, before the end of this ramble.

In one of the illegal fights, Kristi faces off against the Bear. Now you would expect, some big gnarly looking toothless brawler. Nope, not here, instead we get some average sized, random trailer park brawler, who wears American Football shoulder pads, and a red bandanna. It's an average throw-down, that features one very impressive kick from one of the stunt crew. Who runs up a wall and performs a sweet looking spinning kick on the Bear. Another equally outstanding move, sees a guy perform a flying kick from a moving office chair. Rothrock slides an office chair at her opponent in one sequence. Only for the guy to leap onto the chair, and perform a flying kick towards her. A stunt that has appeared in many Hong Kong classics. One opponent Eagle Lee, played by Linn Thai, would look more at home in a traditional Kung Fu movie. With a bright red outfit, knee high suede boots, and claws on the end of his gloves.

*"The Mayor's busting my stones over this one"*

There's two very good kata's in this movie, one featuring Rothrock doing a great demonstration. Performing moves with the twin tiger head hook swords. John Miller, who plays cop Nick DeMarco, also gets in on the weapons use. Demonstrating his skills with the staff, as well as some empty hand drills too. Miller's performance here, is the complete opposite of his money hungry Jason Slade character, from *Honor and Glory*. Here he's just an all-round good cop, who tries to look out for the back-alley fighter Kristi. One action highlight for Miller, see's him take on multiple goons in a gym. It's a real shame that he and former bodyguard Don Niam didn't get more screen work, either in America or Asia. They both looked the part physically, and had the moves to back it up.

Let's now, take a look at the big showdown, that has attracted over a million viewers and counting. When Sting Ray kidnaps his ex-wife's Dr, she's luckily rescued by Kristi and cop DeMarco. What follows is a highly energetic fight, that ends with the killer evading them. It's not long before round two, when the killer is spotted in the same hospital that Kristi and the Dr are seeking medical help at. Before you can blink, there's an over the top showdown between the three main stars. Real life Martial Artist, Donna Jason sits out the action scenes for this production. Why she wasn't used more I don't know?, especially after her debut movie performance. For some reason, the attractive and physically capable Miss Jason, would never make a movie after this one. Rothrock gives her all as usual, even with her character in a sling. Yet it's mostly Niam and Miller who get to knock the spit out of each other. At one point it's more like a face pulling pose-off between the two, than an actual fight for survival. Anyone who has watched Sylvester Stallone movie *Cobra*, will recognize the knife Sting Ray uses. A design, that Stallone created for his *Cobra*. Not sure how they managed to pick up an exact replica of it?.

It's easy to see why this movie has gained such a cult following, but it could have happened to any number of Godfrey Ho movies. It's a picture I'd only recommend to Cynthia Rothrock completists, Godfrey Ho followers, and cult film lover's. This low budget production has little to offer, other than the fighting talents of its stars. The soundtrack is bleak and depressing, and over all the movie feels very flat, even with some of the manic performances. (by DragonClaws of KFF)

**Unmatchable Match (Hong Kong, 1990: Parkman Wong)** - Much better [than *Triads – The Inside Story*] was the following year's *Unmatchable Match*, starring a pre-fame Stephen Chow and once again, the always-dependable Michael Chan. Chow is an undercover cop who is thrown in the same jail cell as Chan, who's a suspect in a big diamond heist that was actually committed by Shing Fui-On (who also had a meaty role in *Triads: The Inside Story*). The escape and form an uneasy alliance, after which they become real friends. Lam Moon-Wah went the John Woo route for this movie, going more for the gunplay than the choppers this time around. There's a fight about midway through where Michael Chan fends off a number of thugs armed with choppers and wrenches at a car garage, so people wanting their fix of seeing stuntmen getting punched and kicked and thrown into car windows can look forward to that. The gunfights themselves never reach the level of a John Woo movie, but are fun enough. There's a tense chase sequence early on with Chow and Chan fleeing from Shing and his men through the narrow hallways of a building. In a touch of black humor, when the actors reach the roof, there are two other Triad gangs carrying out a drug deal. It ends in a gunfight that leaves everybody dead. The movie ends with a tense and well-mounted gunfight inside an abandoned building, with the heroes depending more on strategy and their surroundings rather than pumping countless rounds at their enemies.

**Vampire Kids (Hong Kong, 1991: Lee Paak-Ling)** – aka *Vampire Ressurrection* - A bunch of unlikeable jerks are shipwrecked on a deserted island. While visiting an abandoned village, they manage to rid themselves of some talismans meant keep the ghost of a WW2-era Japanese soldier at bay. The newly-awakened ghost sends five young hopping vampires (jiangshi) to procure the visitors' blood so that he can get strong enough to leave his prison. The movie actually starts out spooky and atmospheric. But then it starts dragging and you realize that only one of the main characters is given a name (the buff guy is named "Buffalo") and that there's nothing resembling real action here. The film had an action director, but I think his job was to orchestrate the wire effects of the young jiangshi being tossed like rag dolls during one comic sequence. This is no Mr. Vampire...or Robo Vampire...or (probably) even Ghoul Sex Squad. (by Blake Matthews)

**Vampire vs. Vampire (Hong Kong, 1990: Lam Ching-Ying)** - Hong Kong stuntman-turned-star Lam Ching-Ying made a whole slew of vampire comedies following the success of his turn in 1985's *Mr. Vampire*, and *Vampire vs. Vampire* is inarguably one of them. Coming on the heels of two official *Mr. Vampire* sequels, the film stands out for a couple of reasons, not the least being that it marks Lam's debut as a director. But, to me, the most interesting aspect of *Vampire vs. Vampire* is the fact that it pits Lam's character against a Dracula-like, Western style vampire — rather than the *jiang shi*, or hopping vampires, seen in the previous entries — and in doing so sets some choice gothic elements against the series' familiar backdrop of Chinese folk magic.

Lam essentially plays the same Taoist priest character here that he does in the *Mr. Vampire* films — in this case simply referred to as “One Eyebrow Priest” — and, as there, is accompanied by a couple of bumbling disciples, Ho (Chin Siu-Ho, reprising his fundamentally identical role in *Mr. Vampire*) and Fong (Lui Fong, of *New Mr. Vampire* and *Mr. Vampire 3*). If possible, these two are even more inept than their counterparts in the original *Mr. Vampire*, making a disaster of absolutely every task they're charged with. They are also responsible for the lion's share of the film's piss and fart jokes, an element that seems to have become a linchpin of the genre somewhere between the outset of the Taiwanese *Hello Dracula* films and now. Another such staple is the inclusion of an adorable little kid jiang shi among the film's central team, here played by Lam Jing-Wang, whose character speaks in an indecipherable, synthesized chirp and whose every hop is accompanied by a comical “BOINGGG” sound effect.

Of course, it is the chaotic haplessness of the One Eyebrow Priest's sidekicks that provides a spotlighting contrast to his own stoic competency — and, indeed, the opportunity for it, for without their agency it seems that most of the spiritual threats the priest is charged with containing would remain safely put. Given Lam's mastery as a physical performer (a mastery that made him a valued associate of both Bruce Lee and Sammo Hung), it's interesting that the character with whom he'd become most widely identified would be one whose power derives primarily from knowledge. As presented in these films, the primary function of the Taoist priest is that of a mental repository for all of the arcane rituals and texts necessary to keeping at bay the supernatural evils so prevalent in their fictional worlds. In illustrating this, *Vampire vs. Vampire* takes to the task of laying out the particulars of these elaborate rites with all the enthusiasm of a gourmet cooking show. This makes it all the more striking when our hero finds himself facing a villain against whom this vast store of specialist knowledge proves useless, forcing him to improvise and, ultimately, fall back upon his skills as a fighter.

The story proper of *Vampire vs. Vampire* begins with Lam's priest using his knowledge of Feng Shui to advise his village's elders on where to commence the digging of a new well. This leads to the discovery that a nearby stream has been contaminated by the bodies of a large number of dead bats. A search for the source of the bat infestation follows, leading the Priest and local officials to a ruined Catholic mission that is in the process of being rebuilt by a group of young nuns and their Mother Superior. During a search of the church, Lam and the Mother Superior

discover a hidden room in which they find the skeletal remains of a priest, one of the Mission's founders, amid evidence of a catastrophic battle between good and evil. The Mother Superior tells Lam that this priest was one of two that came to the mission ten years previous, and speculates that the other, missing priest may have succumbed to the assaultive evil spirits and become possessed.

The Mother Superior here is played by the Macao Born, half-Portuguese/half-Chinese performer Maria Cordero. Cordero is primarily famous as a singer, known to Chinese audiences for her brassy stage persona and Western-style, R&B inflected vocal delivery, but she has also acted in a wide range of Hong Kong films. Here much comedy is mined from her physical heft (Cordero, who has in more recent years hosted a cable cooking show, has come to be affectionately known by her fans as "Fat Mama Maria"), but, to Cordero's credit, what one ultimately takes away from her performance is the fierceness and resourcefulness that her character brings to both the strenuous task of rebuilding the mission and to the protection of her young charges. Cordero also takes part in a number of exchanges with Lam that underscore the alien-ness with which each regards the other's faith, Lam even saying to her at one point that the two don't speak the same spiritual language. Nonetheless — and despite the film enlisting Cordero's character in a couple of satirical potshots at Christian practice — the two are presented as a quirky and appealing heroic duo, allied on equal footing regardless of their differences.

Anyway, with the mystery of the bat infestation still an open question, Lam returns to the more pressing issue of determining the site of the well, and soon designates a spot at which digging is then planned to commence the next day. In the course of the night, however, a flock of bats descends upon the marker and moves it, with the result that, when the crew does start digging, they unearth the leering corpse of the missing priest, a ruby encrusted crucifix driven through his chest — an event made even more deliciously ominous by the raised body being silhouetted against a suddenly darkening sky amid a flurry of animated lightning.

A worried Lam advises that the priest's corpse should be burned as quickly as possible. But *Vampire vs. Vampire* would not be a worthy heir of the *Mr. Vampire* franchise without the inclusion of a comically pompous police captain among its cast of characters, and in this case that captain (Billy Lau Nam-Kwong, also reprising nearly identical roles in previous *Mr. Vampire* films) is determined to prize the bejeweled cross from the body for his own personal enrichment. Aided by his cousin (Sandra Ng Kwun-Yu), with whom he has a somewhat queasy-making romantic relationship, the Captain substitutes a statue for the body when it comes time for putting it on the pyre and sets to work on removing the cross from the genuine article. Of course, once this is accomplished, it only succeeds in resurrecting the rotting cadaver, which quickly sprouts fangs and makes short work of Sandra Ng. Thus rejuvenated, the beast then assumes the form of a snarling feral vampire who looks like a cross between the Hammer version of Dracula and a young Nick Cave.

It should go without saying that my above attempts at summary would be revealed as misleadingly focused and linear if one were to compare them to the narrative flow of the actual *Vampire vs. Vampire*, which exhibits all of the digressive and episodic qualities typical of its subgenre. Such a film must establish, after all, its occurrence within a world in which the supernatural is both commonplace and a part of the work-a-day routine of its protagonists. Also requisite are a sufficiently generous number of juvenile comedic set pieces. Toward the first end, *Vampire vs. Vampire* includes, interspersed throughout its central story, sequences in which Lam and his crew come up against a toothy blob of spectral ooze, a forest of possessed palm trees, and the ghost of a murdered prostitute who in turn possesses both Ho and Fong. All of these provide the opportunity for a welcome abundance of fun and effective practical and animated effects, with probably the most visually stirring sequence being one in which Lam implements a spiritually-infused hot air balloon in a dream-like nocturnal search for the missing body of the dead prostitute. Toward the second end, there are too many instances of raucous low comedy to mention, with probably the most amusing of those being the one in which a vampire-ized Sandra Ng is put off biting Billy Lau by a repulsive boil on his neck.

Despite these various narrative detours, Lam, as director, does an admirable job of ratcheting up a tense and foreboding atmosphere in the build-up to the film's reveal of its central threat — even if one must struggle to divine that build-up amidst manic pacing that's less the fault of Lam than it is of the generic standards of 1980s Hong Kong action cinema. Regardless, once that threat hits the stage, *Vampire vs. Vampire* snaps tightly into focus, providing for a final act that is both gripping and propulsive. To wit, it is not long before Lam's Priest realizes that all of the spells and talismans central to his practice are completely ineffective against this new, foreign breed of vampire — and the initial panic and dismay that the formerly unflappable holy man exhibits in the face of that realization is truly jarring.

Adding to the problem is the fact that this vampire, in addition to being impervious to Taoist magic, is also seemingly imbued with Hulk strength, capable of both breaking through stone walls and tossing the Priest and his men around like rag dolls. In response, Lam and his crew adopt an improvised strategy that is as much fight as flight, initially involving a lot of running away, but ultimately coalescing when Lam determines that, if he can't defeat

Dracula with little strips of scripture imprinted paper, he will simply have to beat the living shit out of him. This, in keeping with the series, is accomplished in a number of imaginatively staged fight sequences, in this case choreographed by Lee Chi-Git and Stephen Tung Wai, who were recruited, one might guess, to free up the usually more hands-on Lam so that he could focus on his directing chores.

The enduring appeal of Lam Ching-Ying's Taoist priest is not hard to understand; he's an extremely likable hero. His character is refreshingly free of all of the tiresome signifiers of badassery so prevalent in today's cinematic action heroes. Instead, he's just a humble guy who happens to be very good at his job for the simple reason that, well, you're *supposed* to be very good at your job. This aptitude does not render him immune to moments of unflattering pomposity or occasional comic humiliation, nor does it render him superhuman in any emotional sense. This is not a character that you will see walking unflinchingly away from a massive explosion; he will instead frantically run for cover from said explosion because that is the sensible thing to do, and then, once composed, return dutifully to the business at hand. All of the above makes him a protagonist that is, despite how phantasmagorical his context may be, very easy to both identify with and root for. Modern action filmmakers should be reminded of this — and watch this film, as well as some of those Jackie Chan movies that are actually good, to spur their memory.

These aforementioned qualities of Lam's character also make it all the more affecting when, in *Vampire vs. Vampire*, we see him so clearly outmatched and out of his depth. Despite the comical hijinks surrounding them, Lam's fight scenes here have a real sense of peril, of there being something really at stake for him — and, as such, a frantic desperation borne of more than Hong Kong cinema's typical practice of giving fights a pace that is frantic simply for the sake of being frantic. It's a tribute to Lam as both a performer and director that his film can weather the number of sharp tonal about-faces it pulls during its running time, such as when a fight between Lam's crew and the vampire, staged on a dilapidated suspension bridge above a yawning ravine, abruptly shifts from slapstick into pure nail-biting territory.

Still, even for those amenable to the peculiarities of Hong Kong horror comedies, *Vampire vs. Vampire* is not without its flaws. It boasts a farty synthesizer score that is oftentimes more appropriate to an arcade. And tolerance may vary when it comes to Lam Jing-Wang's aggressively cute Little Vampire character — though, personally, I have to admit I was charmed by the precocious talent for physical comedy displayed by the kid in what was an entirely wordless performance. Also, many might find the performance by the Random-White-Guy-Playing-Dracula to be too cartoonishly over the top.

For my part, though, I think there is enough that is wonderful about *Vampire vs. Vampire* to merit overlooking those shortcomings. As an added bonus, I also think that the previously disappointed will find it delivers better on the East-meets-West vampire action than an at-first-blush more promising seeming title like *Legend of the Seven Golden Vampires* — which for many is a redress long in coming. Either way, I think you would have to be a soulless member of the undead to flat out hate this movie, and, thanks to its example, I now know about a million ways to defeat you if you are. (by Todd of Teleport City)

**Velvet Gloves (Hong Kong, 1996: Billy Chan)** - This film is a 90-minute explanation of why Jade Leung's star never took off. While some decisions Michelle Yeoh made might have been questionable, at least her films were rarely boring, and never down to the level of this piece of tedious dreck. It depicts the struggles of a class of policewomen (including Jade), to become part of the elite. The idea certainly has potential — the *Inspector Wears Skirts* series has a similar premise — but here, there is almost no character given to any of the girls; they all blur into each other, like a dozen GI Jane-wannabes.

The director — whoever they may be, since the credits were all in Chinese, and the Internet offers limited assistance either — also seems to believe that if two minutes of the ladies taking on an assault course is good, ten minutes must be better. Another example is the seven-day forced march, which feels like it was filmed in real time, and screws up the most obvious opportunity for tension. It does lead to a somewhat interesting sequence, where three of the women have to last two minutes fighting martial-arts instructors, to avoid getting kicked out. But there is no flow to the plot at all — it lurches from set-piece to set-piece without cohesion or progression. All of which would be tolerable if the action elements weren't handled in such a lacklustre fashion, but there's nothing here to write home about, except in a "PS. Obvious stunt doubling" kind of way.

For some strange reason, this film appears to be unavailable on DVD — should you want to see it (and if you do, I've clearly failed in my mission here), you'll have to see the VCD, with its illegible subtitles and a plot synopsis which shakes hands and parts company with the truth after the first sentence. It opts to visit the land of Wild Fabrication instead, continuing: "Before graduation, the team is called to handle a hostage situation in a jewelry expo. Afterwards the girls are assigned to as the bodyguard of the first lady of a small country. But the first lady's own rebellious guard kidnaps her and executes one of the girls..." There's not a single word of truth there: the movie finishes — abruptly — on graduation day, after yet another training mission.

But if you know what film that synopsis actually describes, do let me know, because it's almost certainly far more interesting and entertaining than this one. It may not be the worst action heroine film I've ever seen, but it's probably the worst ever to come out of Hong Kong, which usually does such things with a certain degree of invention, enthusiasm and energy. None of these are visible here, in any amount. (by Girls With Guns.org)

**Vengeance is Mine (Hong Kong, 1997: Lin Chan-Wai)** - Angel Lee (Yukari) is a just-married Asian-American whose honeymoon in HK is cut short by a home invasion by five masked men. What starts as a robbery of her and her wealthy husband quickly escalates to his murder and her rape. Despite the HK movie industry's history of lewdness, this assault is depicted as a sad and hateful crime. Once again, one is struck by Yukari's striking ability to drain sexuality out of such a scene. With her husband dead, the way is clear for one of Yukari's most magnificent performances. Brimming with bitterness and hatred, she sweats, bleeds and thrusts her suffering in the viewer's face. This is the kind of movie in which one of the assailants is shot, point blank, in the head. His blood spatters over Yukari's face. She doesn't flinch. In other scenes she conjures up hate stares of visceral, chilling intensity.

Although Angel Lee initially cooperates with the police investigation, years eventually go by with no success. Wrecked and bitter, she maintains a vigil at her deceased husband's residence. In the meantime, the five assailants have progressively turned their criminal gains into a succession of increasingly prominent front businesses. They act as producers for a series of violent pornographic movies, to star Angel Lee's sister-in-law. When her sister-in-law comes to HK to begin filming, Angel discovers the connection. The television news and a private detective supply additional details and identities.

During a publicity shoot by her starlet sister-in-law, the most inappropriately named Angel undergoes a virtual breakdown. Raggedly attired in black, sweating profusely, her hair plastered, bleeding from one nostril, and makeup smeared blotchily, Yukari looks ghastly. The contrast between her sweaty wretchedness and the bright white outfit and seductive posturing of her porn star sister-in-law couldn't be more pointed. Nor could the focus of Yukari's contempt and disgust.

After taking her sister-in-law into a physical embrace, Angel seduces her into her agenda - first as bait then as a killer. As Angel becomes - in effect - a serial killer, she reconstructs her life. As the bodies pile up her shabbiness is increasingly displaced by stylish grooming and an increasingly exultant manner. Various sadistic elements attend the killing of her former assailants. When her first target puts her in a headlock, jack-knifed against his lower torso, she bites him, like an animal, then stabs him in the groin with a fork. When another of her prey resists she calms him down a bit by shooting him. Then he's tied to an industrial band-saw table. He's only temporarily saved by his friends. Eleven die in this shootout, including one gut-shot by Angel at point-blank range. After the surviving gang members kidnap Angel's sister-in-law the police mistakenly allow Angel some time alone with the fourth target - to rough him up a little. This turns into a brutal fight, ended by her stabbing him with a kitchen knife, twisted hard. By the time she shows up for the final fight, Angel's reconstructed character is clad in black leather, with riding breeches and boots, bursting with hostile arrogance. This is the Yukari of old! This dark, violent film explores cynicism and despair. Yukari's character even rejects martial arts as empty and futile. It doesn't matter how low the budget is. As this movie demonstrates, all Yukari needs is someone to hate and good close-ups on her eyes. Favorite line (Yukari): "I'll kill you all." (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Victim (Hong Kong, 1999: Ringo Lam)** - *The Victim* is a strange movie from Ringo Lam, a thriller that is a Frankensteinian amalgam of, in order, a kidnap thriller, a haunted house movie, a possession movie, and a heist thriller. Incredibly it almost holds together, and manages to be very entertaining.

The movie opens with a van speeding out of a parking garage, killing a security guard in the process. The police, led by Pit (Tony Leung), determine that the people in the van kidnapped one Manson Ma (Ching Wan Lau), an unemployed computer programmer. The police pick up Manson's girlfriend, but she claims no one would have a reason to kidnap him. Stymied, the police tap the couple's phone, and wait for a ransom call. When the call comes the voice on the line doesn't ask for a ransom, but rather instructs the girlfriend to go to an isolated hotel. The hotel was abandoned in the sixties because of a gory murder/suicide (the owner killed his wife because he thought she was cheating on him, then gave his young son rat poison and killed himself), and is reputed to be haunted. Pit and his partner Bee take the girlfriend there, and break in to see what they can find. The hotel is suitably creepy, and some strange things happen, the last of which is Manson suddenly appearing in a room where he wasn't minutes earlier, hanging upside down from the ceiling.

Pit takes Manson into custody to interview him, but the kidnapped man is not very helpful. He's largely non-communicative, and when he does talk it's in phrases related to the murder at the hotel. The interrogation ends when Manson vomits all over the table and passes out.

After his girlfriend takes him home Manson continues to act strangely. He accuses her of cheating on him, and becomes strangely obsessed with the small rose garden behind their house. He dotes on the garden, then inexplicably paves it over.

Pit continues to keep an eye on Manson because the kidnapping still doesn't make sense. Days later Manson calls someone from a bar and Pit has the call traced to another woman. Is Manson having an affair? Or is something more sinister going on?

It would be unfair to give away any more of the plot. *Victim* changes gears every half hour or so, though you can tell Ringo Lam is more interested in crafting the gritty crime drama parts than supernatural thriller parts. About a half hour in a car chase breaks out for no real reason, and I realized *Victim* wasn't going to be the haunted house movie it had appeared to be up to that point. When all is laid bare it turns out that one character executed a plan far too complicated for anyone to actually plan, and even took the time to lay some false clues s/he couldn't possibly think she'd need, but *Victim* is still a pleasing mystery. (by Scott Hamilton of Stomp Tokyo)

**Wandering Heroes (Taiwan, 1990: Kevin Chu Yen-Ping)** - The risk with Chu Yen-Ping's brand of manic Taiwanese cinema is that it can go perfectly right and awfully wrong. Never one to hold back especially when letting himself deal in comedy and kids performing it, it can be Taiwan cinema at its most grating too. While not striking up a dizzying combo of movie tributes and adventure akin to Golden Queen's Commando and Pink Force Commando here, *Wandering Heroes* provides us with a full plate and Chu doesn't go overboard once he knows he can get farting kid into this mix.

Gathering together a group of kids and young adults (main trio being Nicky Wu, Alec Su & Banny Chen) who've lost who they thought were their parents to the murdering instincts of the Black Hawk Clan, what connects them all is a piece of a treasure map their parents possessed. A scarred clan (literally as they wear masks over horrible burn scars) are after a legendary treasure and the gang tries to intercept them before it falls into the wrong hands...

A movie of contrasts but not as jarring as the comedic opening where we see characters cry over the debts mounting in a game of Monopoly that then cuts to them in full view (again the burn make-up) and a prison break. Chu then takes his time in a valid manner to tell four separate stories before the good gang is gathered up. Alec Su's Hsiu Kai and his father are a kind of Marty McFly/Doc Brown pairing as the skateboarding kid has a backpack of inventions that includes an emergency jetpack and Banny Chen feels like an echo of Tom Cruise in *Cocktail* so the movie fan/rip off artist (depending on the viewer you are) Chu Yen-Ping is not shy about lifting elements (but not scenes). Key to making this work in a fairly pleasurable way though is attention to energy involving the gadgets, rather dangerous stunts during chase sequences and no lazy dip into loud, grating comedy.

While the somber melodrama, as this involves several sobering deaths, and not giving in to greed being a moral thread is present distinctively, Chu manages to strike a balance of light, some seriousness and Taiwan action style adventure that's fairly low on violence despite the opening. Achieving almost automatic colour via the masked Black Hawk Clan and showing confidence in getting the movie into energetic mode after slower, talkier sections, it is perhaps the fourth story that begins to stall matters a bit.

Although it does involve the lovely Lin Shao-Luo and her kid brother (who has the map tattooed on his ass. Cue flatulence humour) and various action detours making matters akin to a Wuxia pian for stretches, there is somewhat restlessness here but once getting veteran David Tao to lead the gang, their pimped out vehicles ready for 'Mad Max' style action, the movie finds a footing and even its greed-thread pays off in a respectful manner. Chu had that on his mind but also veteran skill to make the frame alive at almost all times. (by So Good Reviews)

**War Name Desire, A (Hong Kong, 2000: Alan Mak)** - Director Alan Mak has produced a film that at times may feel slightly derivative and at other times may seem to be almost trying too hard to be cool, but it is overall a terrifically stylish entry into what could be termed the "Milkyway genre" of the past few years. In only his third film – the other two being the underrated *Nude Fear* and the very clever *X-Mas Rave Fever* – Mak displays both a painterly eye mixed with seamless and modernistic film technique. His lush color schemes and use of dramatic close ups create a number of vivid and unforgettable images. From his films so far, Mak is clearly a director to look out for.

What the film is lacking though is the grit that is needed to make it more involving. It is almost too smooth and colorful – a touch of noir realism was needed to make me care more about the outcome. The character development and the relationships feel undernourished as they are derived almost entirely through minimalist shorthand – a gesture, a look. The film though is constantly on the move and only covers a few days in the lives of the characters so perhaps this was necessary.

Daniel Chan (one of HK's current pop singing idols) comes to Thailand looking for his long missing brother Francis Ng. Tagging along with him is his girlfriend, Pace Wu, who clearly needs to be burped in the worst way. Ng left HK 16 years ago with \$50,000 of the family's money after committing murder. Chan is demanding repayment - with interest of \$1.95mm – but in reality it is his resentment over his brother leaving and a need to face him that brings Chan to this place.

Chan finds his brother with the help of a sleepy eyed Sam Lee in a small town in Thailand that seems to be a haven for Chinese fugitives on the run, but he couldn't have picked a worse time to show up. Koreans have moved into Ng's gambling business thus forcing some of Ng's men to break the rules by selling drugs to make money. Behind it is Henry, who makes a play for the leadership as he first tries to set up Chan on a murder charge and then later kidnaps Pace. When Ng turns to the big boss – King – to settle matters, King instead tells Ng that he has two days to show his loyalty by killing his own brother.

Ng only seems to have his right hand man Dave Wang and Wang's sister, Gigi Leung, on his side while Henry seems to have an inexhaustible supply of men to throw at Ng. Fortunately though, both Wang and Gigi are extremely proficient professional killers and Ng isn't much of a slouch in the killing department either. There are a number of well-filmed and stylish gunplay scenes that take place and there is an assassination attempt amid a lavishly colored water festival that is stunning.

Gigi is a real standout here. She doesn't show up until well into the film, but it immediately picks up a shot of energy and a burst of star power when she does. Playing against type, her quiet and composed killer strikes a real resonance – and her feelings for Ng are transmitted in only the smallest and subtlest of ways.

Francis Ng is as always excellent as well – forceful but fair in his dealings – and he creates an intriguing if slightly mysterious character. I can't say I found the performances of the other actors all that compelling though. Wang is solid but not spectacular while both Chan and Pace barely registered. This hurts the film in the beginning because at first the focus of the film is on them – but as the story shifts to Ng and Gigi it picks up strongly and the last 30 minutes of the film is a knockout. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Way of the Lady Boxers (Hong Kong, 1993: Wong Wai-Yip) - aka *Madam the Great; Angel Kickboxers*** - The only reason to go out of your way to see this very standard and often times dull "girls with guns" film is to watch Sharon Yeung (aka Yeung Pan Pan). Though she was certainly one of the better female action stars, she did not appear in very many modern action films. Most of her best work was in the earlier kung-fu films of the late 70's and early 80's. Here she has a number of fighting scenes that display her athletic abilities.

The plot is very routine – the most interesting part of it being it's very pro-Mainland attitudes. This is certainly reflected in its Chinese title – "Pull Open Iron Curtain". Sharon is a HK cop chasing after some drug/arm dealers and in the opening she kills one of the top dealers. The brother of this dealer then attempts to kill Sharon throughout the film. She and her partner then follow the case to the Mainland where they have to co-operate with cops, Sibelle Hu and another kung-fu star – Carter Wong. At first Sharon is a lone ranger type, but by the end of the film she is enlightened and sees the folly of her ways. As Sibelle states "it is much better when we work together". Perhaps some of the funding came from the Mainland for this film or maybe they were just getting prepared for 1997.

There is a fair amount of action, but most of it is not all that well done with Sharon's fights being somewhat the exception. Even hers though are a bit inconsistent. In some of them she uses wires and can improbably jump 20-feet, while in other scenes they don't use wires and she becomes very earthbound. She still has some good moments such as jumping off a building while holding on to a balloon, being dragged along by a truck and grabbing on to the bottom of an elevator for dear life.

Sibelle Hui's popularity in action films is somewhat mystifying. This popularity stems I believe from her appearances in two Lucky Stars films of the mid-80's and she has gone on to make a seemingly infinite number of low budget action films. She is certainly attractive and I enjoy her in her non-action moments – but she has no martial arts



abilities at all and it is always very obvious that she is being doubled in any scene that involves anything slightly acrobatic. Most times it really doesn't bother me too much unless she is fighting side by side with someone of Sharon or Moon Lee's capabilities and then her lack of mobility and her slowness is very evident. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Wheels on Meals (Hong Kong, 1984: Sammo Hung) – aka *Spartan X*** - A movie with the three brothers. Good. That means a good movie. Without failure, it works every time. *Wheels on Meals* is a very VERY popular movie, probably because it had a comic book and made a big impression in Japan. Plus, it introduced us to some whities who could move as good, if not better, than most HK actors. These 2 men were Benny Urquidez, also known as The Jet, and Keith Vitali, the latter I haven't heard much of. Urquidez, he was in *Dragons Forever*, and man he's good. I'll get into that at the end.

*WOM* isn't chock full of action. Actually, it has a VERY VERY good blend of comedy, action, and some story thrown in. It's probably the funniest Lucky Stars movie (even better than *Winners and Sinners*) that I've ever seen. The humor is so slapstick yet witty that you can't help but laugh. It's stupidly funny. I love it. And Biao and Jackie are the ones with the woman this time. Sammo, eh, he's more of a trouble maker like in *Project A*, yet he's a hired investigator.

Ok the plot doesn't matter. It's really kinda stupid. But Jackie and Biao do some good action and other odd stunts here and there. To start it off, they train. Here, the two of them show off a flurry of kicks, which are training kicks so they just look good, and some punches. Jackie punches, Biao moves. It's good, trust me. Later on, Jackie and Biao, doing their job, take on skateboards to deliver food. It's impressive, really. Jackie can skateboard, but there are times when he's moving around as though on skates, which he was. So, he didn't skateboard the whole time. That's ok, he did do a back handspring onto one. Biao can skate too. They're both impressive. I still can't see how Jackie made it big and at the same time Biao didn't.

Ok, big deal they can skate. So can I, right? Fast forward to near the end. Sammo is in the van, which takes a turn going maybe 35 miles per hour, and he jumps out over the road to a slope. That's Sammo work, and if your waist is over 42 inches, can you do that? Later on (or maybe beforehand, dunno), Biao and Jackie take on Urquidez and Vitali (who I'll get into later), respectively. I like this scene. Both Vitali and Benny are really awesome. They're a flurry of movements that blend awesomely well, and although it's a short segment, which is meant to let you know what Jackie and Biao are up against, it's sweet and a good way to lead up to the next part.

Fast forward again to the end, where they invade the castle at night. Jackie climbs a 30 foot wall by putting sticks (not planks you can step on, you loggers out there) into little holes (just 2 sticks, he has to be economical) and making his way upward. Of course, he has to swing himself around to do this. It's a good Jackie moment. When they make it inside, a fight ensues for a good 12 or 15 minutes. I'll start with Sammo. He takes on a swordsman. I dunno who he was, but the audience was expected to believe that he was White, but he had an Asian double, so let's just focus on Sammo. He fences without a sword for some time. Flinging himself all over the place, he avoids a sword, something many people can't do. Then he equips himself with one, fences, looks impressive, equips one more, uses both of them, impresses, and that's it. That's all you see of Sammo. I didn't particularly like that because Sammo has some talent that wasn't used here. Too bad.

Biao fights Keith Vitali, someone I hadn't heard of before, and hadn't heard from since. Vitali is good, exceptional. He can look good while moving, which gives him an edge over basically all white actors besides a handful. He and Biao do a little fighting, but a lot of the time Biao is jumping all over the place to avoid the 6'3 kicker. Biao accomplishes some awesome feats. He pummels a BIG table without a problem, twice, jumps into a niche in a wall for a second before rolling onto the headboard of a couch (or whatever that part is called, the piece on top), and stands on top of a big table, does a front flip, and lands, seated, in a chair, and then jumps over a table into another chair, all in one small scene, plus some other stuff. Biao is a movement master. That's obvious. Vitali is fast and did a great job of keeping up with Biao. I dunno what condition the guy is in now because *Wheels on Meals* was made around 1984 or something, so maybe he's too old to move now. I don't know. Just to let you all know, though, this guy is good. So keep an eye out for something that he may have been in before.

Ok. Jackie Chan's best fight ever is probably a toss between this next one and the last one with Ken Lo in *Drunken Master 2*. Perhaps because they're so different in nature, there is no final ruling. *DM2*'s fight is classic Drunken Style, this one's boxing, good, fast, insanely fast, boxing. Chan has never looked so good boxing before. When he's boxing, you think he could take Stallone, Van Damme, and Dolph Lundgren all at once and walk away smiling within a half minute. Urquidez, his opponent here, matches him. There's no question, Benny Urquidez is the exception to the He is the exception to the white-men-can't-move-as-fast-as-Jackie rule. I think he's even better looking than

Vitali. Benny is probably no taller than 5'6, which is 4 inches shorter than Jackie, and he makes every inch of that body do exactly what he wants it to do. If he wants to do kick, he kicks without delay. And next to that, you just have to look at him in *Wheels on Meals* to realize that he's a tough guy. Van Damme has to make a grimace, Benny just looks a few centimeters away from the camera. That should give you a vague idea as to my opinion of him. It seems as though he did all the training that Jackie did, and they make the fight work so well that it made the movie worth the wait. Actually it made the movie worthLESS, because it's such a highlight that.. ok enough, I'll just describe it.

At the start, the two of them are just beginning. Sammo's trying to get out the door, after trying with Benny, and the Jet doesn't want him to leave. So Jackie is holding Benny back. A punch of punches from Benny, Sammo sweeps, he jumps out of the way, but Jackie jumps and holds him against the wall and jumps away, holding Benny, as Sammo runs. The two of them on the ground, they do some rolls and footwork that you have to watch probably 7 times to understand, but Benny kicks, blocked, Jackie does a front handspring from a sitting position to avoid a kick from Benny which goes almost to a forward roll, Jackie recovers doing the splits downward while Benny rolls away, Jackie lunges forward with a punch to Benny's face as he backs off. You'll have to see it. Next, and here's what I like in choreography, Benny is taking off his coat and Jackie, seeing that it's an opportunity to strike, lunges forward but Benny already saw this coming and does a reverse kick to Jackie's stomach. Very good choreography, everything had a meaning here. Benny goes again to Jackie by kicking, Jackie ducks, 2 punches to Jackie, blocked, Benny goes underneath with a hopeful sweep, Jackie lifts his leg to avoid, Benny uses the same leg, already ready, to kick Jackie in the face while he's busy putting his foot back down and turning the other way to find Benny. Again, a small sequence has so much happening that it has to be watched over and over. Jackie has the need to pull off his sweater because, in fighting, you can't wear a jacket or warm material, that's a rule. As he's pulling it off, Benny attacks but remembers what he did to Jackie when he took his own jacket off, he did a reverse kick to the stomach, so he goes in more quickly but Jackie just holds his foot out as he falls back to stop Benny, kicks him once more, and pulls the damn thing off. HA! Jackie tries to get some more hits by throwing 2 spaced out punches at Benny, both blocked, both of which Jackie leaned forward to throw, so he figures, 'why not fake forward, lean backward and catch him off guard?' Benny, seeing the fake, throws a chop to Jackie's face that I've tried to replicate but I can't get my arm to swing that quickly.

Later on, after some Biao action that I've already covered, they back up into the dinner table, where Jackie's pinned against his back and Benny's throwing punches like mad. When Jackie pushes him away, Benny goes for a reverse roundhouse which blows out the candles behind where Jackie ducks. It's amazing what you can do to make someone look so fast. Totally effective. More and more of this stuff, new material, good moves, everything works. They pin each other on the floor, throw series of punches, kicks, knees, elbows, and Jackie does one of the best roundhouses I've ever seen where he gets his head a few inches off the ground!

This is one of my favorite fights ever on HK cinema. I'd go into detail more, but I think I've overdone it by a long shot. One could analyze this fight like a well written piece of literature if they wanted. These movements HAVE A PURPOSE. Jackie punched there because it was the BEST place to punch. Benny blocked and returned the punch or kick because Jackie was open there. Whatever it was, it was well done. This is the kind of stuff in *Prodigal Son*. You see a serious event occur, and you can trace it back and see why it happened. THESE TWO PEOPLE ARE TRYING TO HIT EACHOTHER. It's so well done, and it's the choreography AND the actors that make the fight. You can't have a good fight without either one slacking or even lacking in the least bit.

I'd give the movie a 10/10 if it had a little more than that good fight and the small Biao fight, but I can't do that. It'd be too generous. (by Eric Jacobus of The Stung People)

**Where's Office Tuba (Hong Kong, 1986: Philip Chan, Ricky Lau)** - I finally watched this last night, after it's been sitting in my pile of unwatched Joy Sales Legendary Collection DVD's for what feels like forever. Lately I've been on a heavyweight crime & revenge Korean movie kick, so I thought it would be nice to sit back with a lightweight Sammo comedy for a change of pace!

I knew that the movie is primarily a comedy, with action coming a distant second, but regardless of that, I loved every minute of it! Just to touch on the action, it really goes to show how different recent Hong Kong action movies are from back in their 80's heyday, when a movie like this one, which isn't even primarily an action movie, fits in more stunts into it's opening few minutes than any recent effort does into it's whole run time!

In the first couple of minutes, a guy falls from a second storey window, another guy is kicked down a flight of stairs, another guy is thrown out a moving vehicle, there is a truly cringe inducing stunt where a guy does a double footed flying kick head on into the windshield of the previously mentioned moving vehicle, then finally there is an impressive car stunt where it goes flying off the embankment and into a river! This is just the opening of the movie,

we're lucky if we see this kind of stuff in the finale of any recent action movie Hong Kong has produced, let alone the beginning of a comedy!

The movie works great as a comedy, and it always feels like something special when you see so many HK legends on screen at the same time...in this movie we get Sammo, Yuen Wah, Hwang Jang Lee, David Chiang, Chang Yi, Joey Wong, & Jacky Cheung. Special mention should also go to the hilarious, if barely 2 seconds, cameo from Lam Ching Ying in 'Mr Vampire' mode!

Of course, it would be a lie to say I wasn't looking forward to seeing Sammo versus Hwang Jang Lee. I heard many comments before that they have a 'brief fight' in the movie, perhaps this set my expectations extremely low, because these days when people refer to something as brief in a HK movie it literally seems to translate to a couple of seconds of punches and kicks, edited to hell. That's definitely not the case here, Hwang dishes out the punishment to Sammo for a satisfying amount of time, with Sammo getting a few licks in as well. As it is with what feels like 90% of Hwang Jang Lee's movies, Sammo as the hero concedes that he is pretty much impossible to beat, and he gets the upper hand in what some might consider a ridiculous way (but come on, think about how he was beaten in 'Ninja in the Dragons Den!'). But being that this is a comedy, I find it entirely forgivable, and as I mentioned before they go at it for a good stretch before any comedy element comes into it.

All in all I'd definitely recommend the movie for anyone that classes themselves as a Sammo fan, as it is with a good amount of his movies, it's not filled with wall to wall fights, nor is it meant to be, but what's there is complete gold, and the rest is a great comedy which has more than a few laugh out loud moments, I'm definitely glad I finally got around to it. (by Paul Bramhall)

**Who Am I? (Hong Kong, 1998: Benny Chan, Jackie Chan) – aka Jackie Chan's Who Am I?** - Back in high school, my main dealer in quality Chinese cinema was a good friend of mine whom I'll call Jaak-tin. Being Chinese, he had access to a lot of Chinese films that hadn't been released by American distributors at that time, including a number of newer Jackie Chan films, like *Mr. Nice Guy* and this film. As a result, I got to see both of those films (in addition to others) a number of months before mainstream American audiences did, which was indeed a good thing.

I actually rolled my eyes when I first read about this one (I believe it was mentioned in [The Ultimate Jackie Chan Sourcebook](#)). It mentioned Jackie Chan going to Africa and losing his memory while living with an African tribe. I thought to myself, "Oh gosh! This is probably going to have a lot of KOMIC HIJINKS! from Chan and not a lot of good action." So when Jaak-Tin lent the film to me, I was a bit surprised that he had already gotten a copy of it (my reaction, "Wow! It's been released already?"), but a bit weary of what was in store for me. Thankfully, the film I got was one of the last great Jackie Chan films ever made.

It did take a little while before I came to have my own copy of it, though. In the meantime, my friend Paul, whom I helped get into the genre, bought this film and it became the source of much mirth among our group of friends. In addition to watching the movie's fight scenes over and over again, we would quote the film countless times (especially Paul) and even name a theoretical fighting style from a line of one of the characters. It is indeed a special film to me for all these reasons.

Early on in the film, we have a crack team of operatives, including Jackie, a Hong Kong cop, attack and capture a group of scientists in South Africa. They are told that the scientists are EEEEEVIL, bent on getting hold of a recently fallen meteor that may or may not have special explosive properties, that they want to use for their NEFAAAAAAARIOUS purposes. Well, the team is successful and the scientists are captured. Unfortunately, the team leader betrays them and makes their plane crash (in Namibia, I think). Only Jackie survives the ordeal, although he lost his memory when the plane crashed. He is found and nursed back to health by an African tribe, with whom he stays for a while.

Some time later, a Japanese brother-sister team of drivers are in the middle of a cross-country race through a couple of African countries. Their SUV breaks down and the brother is bitten by a snake. Luckily for the sister, Yuki (Mirai Yamamoto, *The Boy from Hell*), Jackie Chan is nearby and he is able to save the brother with an ingenious coconut IV, in addition to fixing the car. The three go back to Johannesburg where Chan becomes a local hero because his life-saving awesomeness. This attracts the attention of Morgan (Ron Smerczak, *Operation: Delta Force 3 AND 5*), a CIA operative, and Cristine Stark (Michelle Ferre), a journalist. Despite the efforts of Yuki and Cristine, Jackie still can't remember what happened at the beginning of the film. There's a so-stupid-it's-funny scene where Yuki tries to help Jackie by popping up out of nowhere and scaring him.

Unfortunately, all this attention is short-lived, as Jackie Chan still can't remember exactly who he is and before long, he's being hunted by the South African Secret Service (or whatever you call it), who have figured out that he was involved in the kidnapping of the scientists. Of course, they refuse to believe that he's really an amnesiac and that he doesn't know what exactly happened. They're ready to throw him in prison when he escapes, Jackie Chan-style.

Right after that, some hired killers try to erase Chan, leading to a wacky car chase in which he, Yuki, and Cristine try to drive Yuki's SUV while handcuffed.

Jackie's quest leads him to Rotterdam where the pieces of the puzzle slowly start to come into the place. You see, the meteor really did have strong explosive properties and Morgan is really a double-agent working for some evil arms manufacturers. The scientists were kidnapped in order to develop a super weapon ("Imagine a machine gun with the power of a ballistic missile" is how one character puts it) that could then be sold to interested parties for a very large quantity of film. Cue some really good fight and stunt sequences.

Despite having some really good action, the film isn't wall-to-wall fighting and stuntwork. It takes a while for the film to really get going, with the first real fight occurring only near the end of the second act. Once the film does get going, it never relents and is consistently entertaining. This is thanks to Jackie Chan's always-inventive fight direction and charismatic acting. Benny Chan, a commercial director who's best known for his fast-paced police thrillers, gives this film a good sense of pace, although Jackie's presence means that the action won't have the hard edge many other of Benny Chan's films would have (this would change in *New Police Story*). However, this wouldn't be a Benny Chan film without a number of policemen getting offed, which can be seen in the beginning of this film. Nonetheless, this is more of a Jackie Chan film than a Benny Chan film; the aforementioned *New Police Story* would strike a better balance between the Benny's and Jackie's styles.

Observant viewers will notice that the plot is very similar to that of *Police Story IV: First Strike* (1996). Yes, both films deal with a fish-out-of-water Hong Kong cop taking corrupt government agents dealing in powerful weapons. Both films also benefitted from being set in two countries outside of Hong Kong (The Netherlands and South Africa here; Russia and Australia in *First Strike*). It is the earlier film, however, that does a slightly better job at keeping its plot straight, since this film has a lot of ideas and characters that just seem to appear and disappear whenever convenient. The whole bit about the South African Secret Service is a logical direction for the story to take, but it's forgotten about as soon as Chan goes to Rotterdam. The same can be said about Mirai Yamamoto's character, who disappears from the film at the same point. More baffling is the initial subplot of Chan being taken in by the African tribe that really doesn't go anywhere at all. At least in *Shanghai Noon*, Chan got a Native American wife who helped him get out of a number of pickles during the film's running time. Jackie Chan as a member of an African tribe has some potential, but is forgotten about as soon as he gets to Johannesburg, and makes me wonder why it was even included.

Another problem with the story is that there is simply no urgency. I mean, I would expect a little bit more suspense from an evil plot to sell machine guns that could easily take out entire city blocks to evil arms dealers, but said weapons and the meteorite fragments are nothing more than McGuffins during the film. Had one of the bad guys been armed with a pistol that had the destructive power of an antitank weapon, it might've been a bit more compelling. Instead, we get one sequence where we see a laboratory blowing up because of the meteorite, and the dodgy CGI effects in said scene make it seem funnier than anything else.

The last flaw of the film, which may or not may not be a flaw depending on who you talk to, is the acting outside of Jackie Chan. Jackie is Jackie and, speaking English or Cantonese, is always a charismatic and likeable guy. The other actors fare less well, which often leads to some unintended laughs. Michelle Ferre, whose only film credit is this, is especially amateurish in this film. My friend Paul's favorite bit is where she reveals herself to be a member of the CIA. Her change of tone from what she was previously saying is so abrupt that it makes us laugh every time. Ron Smerczak, a B-movie veteran in the United States, fares a little bit better. Ed Nelson, who plays the General, is an experienced TV actor and plays his role broad enough that there no menace from him or from the organized crime guy he's dealing business with. They do get some good lines, though ("You missed! You idiot! And you, short-stuff! You got a fraction of a second to hand over that disk!")

Unsurprisingly, it's the action where this film really excels. It won the 1999 Hong Kong Film Award for Best Action Design, beating out Dion Lam's CGI-heavy choreography from the popular *The Storm Riders* and Stephen Tung's down-to-earth action direction in the modern-day Jet Li thriller *Hitman*. The action is all pretty solid until the finale, which is one of the best Jackie Chan fights of all time (in my opinion) and arguably his best fight since 1994 (when he did *Drunken Master II*). Some may argue that that isn't so much of a compliment, considering the number of films he did after 1994 that had disappointing finales (*Thunderbolt*; *Rumble in the Bronx*; *The Medallion*; *The Myth*; *Rush Hour 2*; *Mr. Nice Guy*; etc.). That doesn't take away from the fact that the last fight is ten pounds of awesome in an five-pound bag.

The first set piece is when Jackie escapes from the South African agents. It's reminiscent of another fight in *Project A 2*, but better. He's handcuffed to a chair and has to use his agility and wits to get free and hold the agents at bay. It ends with an ingenious stunt where Jackie wraps a cord around a bucket, slips the cord around him, and then does a spinning free fall to the ground. The next big fight is in the streets of Rotterdam, which feature falling pianos and wooden clogs. You see, for some reason Jackie is barefoot during the fight, leading him to take a lot of physical punishment in the name of COMEDY! He then puts on a pair of clogs and starts dishing that punishment back to the thugs. It's a really neat prop fight.

The final fight is a gem. Jackie Chan is on the roof of a building with an incriminating disk and is confronted by two fighters, one Caucasian (Ron Smoorenburg, *Fighting Fish* and *Avengeing Fist*) and a Chinese (David Leung, member of the Sing Ga Ban). The Chinese fighter is a specialist in a hand-based style, one that uses a lot of circular punches, like *choy li fut*. The Caucasian is a super-kicker, not unlike Ken Low. The fight begins with a 30-second bout with David Leung, who wins. Jackie challenges him again and gets the upper hand, beating him with his own tie and suit jacket (there's a subtle bit of comedy where Ron sees this and removes his own tie and jacket).

After getting his [butt] handed to him, David lets Ron fight. After fighting for some time, both of the bad guys gang up on Chan, who proceeds to use the layout of the roof of the building to his own advantage, fighting in, on, under, and around numerous fixtures on the roof in order to not be knocked off the building. There is some very complex choreography on display, and Chan is able to find the perfect balance between martial arts, death-defying stuntwork, and physical humor, including a nice bit with cement bags at the end, during this long fight. Both of the bad guys fight brilliantly, although if you watch the documentary *Jackie Chan: My Stunts*, you'll know that Smoorenburg was doubled by Bradley James Allan in some scenes because he couldn't get the rhythm down.

I find that last fact to be very interesting, because it proves that just being good in the ring or on the dojo floor doesn't necessarily mean that you'll be good in front of the camera (or behind the camera choreographing the fight). Compare Jhoon Rhee's performance in *When Tae Kwon Do Strikes* with, say, Dick Wei or Alexander Lo Rei. All three are *tae kwon do*-trained and Jhoon Rhee is an international Grand Master or something, but it's the other two who have always looked better than Mr. Rhee. Smoorenburg obviously had the kicking skills, but seemed to lack the rhythm and sense of pacing that is very important to a Hong Kong fight. The same thing prevented Ho Sung Park from being the lead villain in *Drunken Master II*. Had Ho had more rhythm and endurance, he might be more well known today than Ken Low is. You need a lot more than just technique to be a great screen fighter, especially in a Jackie Chan film. Ignorant people say that all his films are the same, but there is so much that goes into a well-choreographed Jackie fight that you just can't help but respect Chan, his stuntment, and whoever he hires to be the lead villain.

What I particularly liked about this one fight is that it is an inversion of the Northern Legs/Southern Fist final fight that we used to see in those old Seasonal films starring people like Tan Tao Liang, John Liu, and Hwang Jang Lee. In those, you'd have two heroes (one fist master and one kicker) take on a seemingly invincible villain. Here you have a hero with a threshold for pain thousands of times greater than any normal person take on two bad guys, a fist fighter and a kicker. It's a neat way to bring us back to the old days while still featuring the best of modern fight choreography. Oh, and the fight ends with Chan running and sliding down the side of a building, a stunt that, even with wires, is darn impressive.

*Who Am I?* has a very large number of supporters, although a lot of them seem to enjoy the film simply because they think it was step up from his previous film, *Mr. Nice Guy*. This is similar to way Godzilla fans love *Godzilla 2000* simply because it wasn't the Tri-Star *Godzilla*. I'm really not part of that particular group of people, simply because I like *Mr. Nice Guy* a lot myself. There was a time that it was in my top five Jackie Chan films, although it fell off that list as time went on in part because I didn't like the finale. While the mass destruction caused by Jackie Chan driving a truck through a mansion made of glass is indeed entertaining, Chan should've had a lengthy battle with Richard Norton to top it off. We didn't get that, so I think of that film as merely a good Jackie Chan vehicle and not a great one.

Jackie Chan would come close to one-upping this fight with the final fight of his next film, *Gorgeous*. I like this end fight better, although the finale to that film has a lot going for it, too. Both end fights are certainly better than most anything he's done since, no doubt about it. But unlike *Gorgeous*, *Who Am I?* is first and foremost an action film, and a darn good action film to boot. The action sequences are tons of fun and Jackie is his usual self. The script has some problems, and the supporting cast isn't that great, but those become insignificant when seen in the great scheme of things: Jackie Chan hurting himself for our entertainment. (by Blake Matthews)

**Whore & Policewoman (Thailand, 1993: Wong Kwok-Chu)** - This Thai production leans heavily toward sexual violence, featuring no less than three aggressive sexual assaults. The first is a grim, sadistic whipping of a sex worker "Nana" followed by torture with a snake, performed by a masked assailant. He is actually a popular politician "Kao Tien Chin," (Charley Cho) who covers his crime by having Nana killed in hospital and attempting to have her roommate murdered. This sex worker, "May Lin," is the sole witness. While on the run she telephones Prosecutor "Yin Li Shin" (Kwan Hoi San) who assigns his niece, policewoman "Nancy Chang" (Michiko), to pick up and escort May Lin from her rural hideout. In this film Michiko appears very plainly attired, wearing a baggy, oversized trench coat. Her part occupies the middle third of the film.

May Lin and Nancy Chang narrowly escape several additional murder attempts by Kao's men. When Michiko is shot, May must decide whether to save her or herself. She saves Michiko and extracts the bullet in a fairly graphic

scene. The two of them snap at each other with ill humor, Nancy complaining about May's life choices and May complaining about her lack of opportunities. They are eventually bonded by a common sexual assault. Four motorcycle-riding hoodlums subdue the wounded Nancy and attempt to rape her. May saves her yet again by voluntarily submitting. It's an ugly, degrading scene that reflects the pain of sexual violence and the suffering of sex workers.

After considerable over-acting by May and generally lackluster action scenes, the way is cleared for Michiko and her co-star to develop a screen partnership. But, apart from some unusually reflective musing in a hotel room, this does not occur and Michiko's part unexpectedly peters out on return to Bangkok. Even the women's revenge against the bikers lacks the credibility and emotional force that would be warranted, and the final fight against Kao and his henchmen only leads to an arrest. As a result the film is seriously unbalanced. The violence against women is portrayed all too explicitly, while their retaliation is blunted by comic elements or understatement.

Michiko's fight scenes do feature her customary athleticism, plus some impressive sweep kicks and a kip-up. Despite this movie's serious drawbacks, it does provide Michiko with her longest sustained screen time, with ample opportunity to display her range of acting skill. This, alone, recommends it. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Wicked City (Hong Kong, 1992: Peter Mak)** - If you're a regular Stomp Tokyo reader or an anime fan, you probably recognize the title of this film. We've already reviewed the Japanese animated version of the story, released in 1989. This live-action version, based on the same Japanese comic book, was made in Hong Kong three years later, and features all the sex appeal, all the gore, and all of the objects suspended by wires that one has come to expect from Hong Kong fantasy movies.

*The Wicked City* starts out in Tokyo with Lung (Leon Lai) picking up a prostitute and going back to his hotel room. On the way up they have a suggestive conversation full of puns based on the hooker's nom de sleaze "Perrier." Then as things begin to get hot, the woman transforms into a hideous spider creature. That surprised us, because it's usually something you have to pay extra for. Lung, however, is prepared for this development and tries to shoot the monster with his big gun... Jeez, that sounds like more bad innuendo. When he runs out of ammo, the monster gets the upper hand (or tentacle), and Lung's fat must be pulled from the fire by Ying (Jackie Cheung), who flies in through the window and dispatches the monster with his handy throwing knives.

Lung and Ying are agents for a secret organization (referred to as "the Squad") that combats monster invaders from another dimension. Both of them also have horrible secrets that put them in conflict with the Squad's goals. Ying is actually a half-monster himself, though no one but Lung knows that. Lung, for his part, had a relationship with a monster years earlier. In a flashback we see the lovebirds meet, in a scene that takes inspiration from John Carpenter's *The Thing*. Gaye (Michelle Li) is running from two assailants moving underground, but receives unexpected help from Lung. As the fight develops we find out that Gaye can extend her fingernails into laser-like beams and use them to behead her enemies. This is not as useful as you may think, because her opponents can regrow their heads with a startling ease. But Lung and Gaye persevere and kill the two monsters. Gaye uses her monster powers (which seem to have more uses than a Swiss army knife) to save Lung's life after he is mortally wounded. The haunting "love theme from *The Wicked City*" that plays on the soundtrack tells us that they are destined to be together, even if they separate soon after.

After a while we began to wonder if Lung had another secret. Is he Superman? He seems to have super-speed, but he never takes off his nerd glasses. Actually, we suspect Lung's nerdiness is just a reflection of how the Chinese makers of this film see the Japanese. And, like so many Hong Kong films, settings in Japan are represented entirely by hotels.

Back in the present, the chief of the Squad charges Lung with investigating a drug called "Happiness." Happiness is suspected to be from the monster dimension, because it gives its users super strength, but kills them if they stop using it. This assignment involves keeping an eye on Director Yuen (Japanese actor Tetsuya Nakadai), the head of a multinational corporation who is secretly a monster. Yuen is celebrating his birthday in Hong Kong, and Lung infiltrates the party. There he finds out that Gaye now works for Yuen, who is secretly working to bring monsters and humans together in peace. But as the party progresses, a monster assassin shows up and attempts to kill Yuen. Mind you, this being a monster, she doesn't just come in with machine gun and start killing people. Her assassination plan involves belly dancing, a clock that flies apart into sharpened cogwheels and re-assembles itself, and "liquid monster" hidden in the banquet. This last strategy results in the death-by-Scanners-rip-off of most of the people there, but Yuen survives, later to be captured by the Squad.

The monster behind both the assassination and Happiness is Gwei, Yuen's son. Gwei has a plan to take over the world that involves Happiness and a lot of megalomaniacal laughing, but the details are never clear. In his spare time, when not plotting to conquer the world, he has sex with the monster assassin, who can shape-shift into a number of forms, including a pinball machine. Did Mystique ever think of that?

The plot is very complicated, and, despite our last six hundred words of synopsis, not very important. *The Wicked City* is all about style, and it has that in spades. Lethal flying clocks, goopy shape-shifting monsters, scantily clad babes, and tuxedoed secret-agent types with large firearms are pretty impressive, but the screen really jumps in the last half-hour of the film, when Yuen and Gwei jump out of their human skins to battle for telekinetic control of a jumbo jet circling Yuen's corporate tower. (So that's why the airlines can never get their flights on time!) Demonic fantasy fans looking for a bit of high-flying kung fu and gunplay action to mix with their neon-tentacled monsters need look no further than this. The influence of Sam Raimi is obvious as well, so if you like the *Evil Dead* films, you'll probably be happy with this.

Missing from this live-action version, however, is the light-heartedness that marked the anime version of *Wicked City*. Even with graphic depictions of monster sexuality and some rather gruesome murders, the animated movie had quite a bit of humor and even managed to end on a positive note. This live action tale is about doomed love, power's corrupting influence, and, given Ying's status as a monster-human hybrid, it could even be viewed as a rather pessimistic follow-up to the anime film's hopeful conclusion.

So: which *Wicked City* is better? That depends on what you expect from your evil-beings-from-another-dimension morality plays, especially since the two stories are wildly different. Those with a preference for happy endings should definitely stick to with the anime version: although it's gritty for anime, it still holds a brighter outlook on the world than its HK counterpart, and it has the added advantage of an ability to show on screen whatever the animators can draw. The live-action flick is dependent on practical special effects, and so there are more than a few shots in which the cinematic trickery is evident. This matches with the darker tone of the Hong Kong movie. It's an imperfect world, Lung and Ying tell us, and not likely to get any better, at least not without time and significant effort. We're fond of both films, with their conflicting messages: isn't conflict that which makes life -- and movie watching -- interesting? (by Scott Hamilton and Chris Holland of Stomp Tokyo)

**Widow Warriors (Hong Kong, 1989: Johnny Wang Lung-Wei)** - Relentlessly downbeat, this movie plunges into a heart of darkness. Everyone fights. Almost everyone dies. The action proceeds through three distinct phases, each yielding messages about roles, expectations and loyalty. This is the kind of film in which the heroine's husband is shot, execution-style, on his knees by one of his female in-laws. Other protagonists -- women as well as men -- are shot, dropping into muddy pools or flopping, broken-backed, across a traffic barrier. The heroes die or are maimed. Michiko (playing a Japanese relative "Chieko") is unceremoniously shot, her body dragged away. Later her pale corpse is viewed in the morgue. Kara Hui lies in hospital, bloody and paralyzed with a tube up her nose, vainly trying to signal with her eyes. But no one understands the message.

The plot initially tracks that of *The Godfather*. An aging patriarch (Shek Kin) gathers his family while celebrating the newfound legitimacy of his Triad business ventures. The threat of rivals is fatally underestimated as he and his sons (Ken Lo, Phillip Chan, Michael Chan) are gunned down in the first of three well-executed action sequences. As in *The Godfather*, the grace and symbolism of Peking Opera provide a jarring prelude to the imminent violence.

The survivors are all widows. To preserve the family's business and honor they strike back. Impulsive vengeance leads Michiko, Kara and one of their sisters to their deaths. There are some excellent martial arts sequences, during which Michiko -- wielding a shoto with an inverted grip -- slices through a hapless (and innocent) receptionist as well as several security personnel, then fights with the principal assassin's wife (Ha Chi-chun) in a private gymnasium. After seeming victory, she and her sister-in-law are gunned down when they confront the rival gang. It's sudden and shockingly final. Kara witnesses this and has a magnificent fight sequence, but she too is shot and paralyzed. In the end, as the martial artists fail, it's up to the least martial of the surviving women (Elizabeth Lee) to orchestrate a bloodily brutal GWG finale. This ends with one of them screaming while emptying a machine gun clip into the leading bad guy - who's wearing a white suit and lying on the ground already wounded.

The former "chop-socky" martial arts star, director Wang Lung-Wei serves up a plate of pain. The images fly as fast as the bullets. The symbolism is subtle, yet powerful, as the least martial women of the family clan use intelligence and cunning to prevail where both martial arts and masculine bravura had failed. Once again Michiko is explicitly cast as a Japanese -- an outsider. Significantly, she's the one who, unthinking, recklessly drags her sisters-in-law into a virtual suicide mission.

Michiko is very dressily attired for the family reunion, displaying Japanese formality and “tatemae” (outward behavior). The contrast between her formality and sudden recklessness is an interesting counterpoint to the other, more expressive family members. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Wild Ones, The (Hong Kong, 1989: Francis Sung, David Lam)** - Tough teenage girls gone bad is occasionally a subject that HK films delve into – Sexy and Dangerous, Now or Never, Girls Gang – and this one are a few. This 1989 film has Loletta Lee, Fenny Yuen, Irene Wan and Chan Ka-ling as four troubled teenaged girls looking for fun in all the wrong places. Don’t let the title mislead you though, the Wild Bunch these girls are not and it becomes clear fairly early that behind those snarls is a kitty cat waiting to come out. The film makes a stab at being socially relevant, but that is really neither here nor there – the main pleasure of this film comes from watching Loletta and Fennie play tough behind chewing gum and cigarettes. When the foulest insult is Fennie telling someone “Go eat bananas!” you know these girls won’t be robbing banks any time soon!

Olivia Cheng is a counselor in Canada where one day the cops tell her to go back to HK where she can do some good and oddly enough she does – leaving behind her hunky boyfriend Simon Yam to deal with those Canadian winters

In HK she gets a job as a guidance counselor in a Girls Home where underage girls get sent for committing minor criminal acts. Loletta is here for smashing her wealthy father’s girlfriend’s face through a car window, Fennie for pimping her best friend – Chan Ka-ling – and Irene Wan for not being able to pay for a meal. Just girls having a little fun.

The film follows that basic *To Sir with Love* premise as Olivia tries to break through the tough façade to the real girl underneath. Part of that is investigating the girl’s lives and families to see what the underlying cause is for their behavior. During her investigations, she realizes that one of the girls is her half sister – now what are the chances of that. None of this is very original.

What’s kind of fun again is just the girls. There are plenty of fights among them – Loletta and Fenny take some pretty good whacks at one another and eventually a couple of the girls get in trouble with a triad gang – but thankfully it turns out that Olivia is also a kung-fu expert! Always a plus on the resume. She breaks into a brothel and takes on the triad gang - now that’s a girl’s counselor for you. Not a riveting film by any means – but if any of these actresses are favorites of yours it is an easy way to pass 90 minutes. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Wild Search (Hong Kong, 1989: Ringo Lam)** - Before I (finally) checked out this 1989 offering from director Ringo Lam, I had already felt that I had been provided with positive evidence of the self-described “dark faced god”’s works being more likely to contain scenes of chaotic violence or unglamorous bloodletting than “Heroic Bloodshed”. Ditto re it being so that -- as Law Kar observed in a HKIFF catalogue article entitled “Hero on Fire” -- whereas women are insignificant as well as secondary characters in John Woo’s movies, the females that appear in this often under-rated auteur’s films -- including even those with supporting rather than main parts to play in the overall proceedings -- often do have a strong bearing on the lives of his male protagonists (1997:70).

After viewing that which is one of eight cinematic efforts that paired together Chow Yun-Fat and Cherie Chung, another myth that I feel got debunked was of *WILD SEARCH* being basically the Hong Kong version of “Witness”. To be sure, this small gem of a multi-genre offering does have as its lead character an urban cop who gets to know a female rural resident -- that he ends up falling for -- by way of a small child who had been in the vicinity of a crime that he is investigating. However, in this Nam Yin scripted work (that’s about equal parts action-filled crime drama, slow -- but steady -- moving romance and possibly overly saccharine sweet family drama), the four year old Ka Ka is less the witness of a particular criminal action than the link to the major villain of the piece through her being his (illegitimate) daughter as well as that of the woman (played by Elaine Kam) who was killed while in the middle of conducting an arms deal on his behalf.

Something else that I found interesting about this quite charming movie -- that also has Tommy Wong appearing as Chow Yun-Fat’s character’s professional partner, Nam -- was it being so that: Even while Ka Ka’s situation in *WILD SEARCH* would appear to be more dangerous than that of the boy witness in the 1985 Peter Weir work, no attempts were made to hide the surprisingly emotionally resilient tyke (from those people who one might think would benefit from her being permanently silenced) or provide the young girl with police protection (from anyone other than, as it turned out at one point, her disapproving grandfather). Instead, once her dead mother got properly identified (as being antique shop owner, Elaine Lee), and it was established that Ka Ka has a caring maternal aunt



(who the English subtitles identify as Cher, and comes in the form of Cherie Chung) along with a curmudgeonly grandfather (played by Ku Feng) who had effectively disowned his elder daughter because she had

At least, the affable detective sergeant (portrayed by Chow Yun-Fat) who was in charge of the police raid -- that successfully broke up the arms deal but also resulted in the death of Ka Ka's mother -- was responsible enough to provide the now effectively orphaned kid with his phone number to ring if she ever felt that she was in any danger. However, he -- who actually was named Lau Chun Peng but told the little lass to call "Mew Mew"! -- ended up causing more problems (for himself, if no one else) than solving any by pressing Ka Ka's millionaire father to financially provide for the girl who's the sleazebag's biological -- even if not legal -- offspring. Additionally, there are sub-plots in *WILD SEARCH* which have Mew Mew's actions and very presence in their lives complicating the relations between Cher and her ex-husband (who nursed hopes of reconciling with the woman) as well as Ka Ka and her grandfather.

Still, the really major troubles and twists in the tale stemmed from Ka Ka's mother's business partner -- a Vietnamese man named Bullet (played by Roy Cheung) who often lets his guns do the talking for him -- and cold-hearted boss cum sometime lover remaining at large for much of the film and continuing to import weapons into Hong Kong (and presumably sell to whoever was willing to plus had the financial means to buy them). Indeed, just when this (re)viewer was at the brink of being lulled into a false sense of security by multiple playings of Anita Mui's rendition of "Moonlight Represents My Heart" (a popular plus easily recognizable Chinese song that is most associated with Teresa Teng) among other things, this hitherto surprisingly gentle Ringo Lam movie morphs (back) into one where gun fights and other violent battles are the thrilling order of the day. (by YTSL of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Win Them All (Taiwan, 1992: Yang Ching-Chen) - aka *Gambling Ghosts Are Ready*** - Yukari plays the Taiwanese granddaughter of deceased master gambler Chow. Neither she nor Mark Cheng, who befriends her, are successful gamblers during a trip to Macau. Her grandfather's spirit escapes, chased by spirit guardians, in an attempt to improve his granddaughter's ability to continue the family tradition. After entering the world in a scene copied from "Terminator," his spirit enters the body of a mentally retarded relative of Mark Cheng called Pai Pai who has just been killed in a traffic accident. Both Pai Pai's family and rival gamblers attempt to kidnap the resurrected Pai Pai who has developed extraordinary gambling powers. At one point Yukari shoots seven men in quick succession during a fight at an abandoned steel plant. The final confrontation involves a high stakes poker game between the rival "King of Gamble" and Mark Cheng.

As with several Taiwanese productions, spirits and slapstick alternate jarringly with action sequences. Yukari appears quite lovely in this film, with her trademark very short hair and rather pouting mannerisms. Fortunately, her headstrong, combative character also soon surfaces. Despite some nice kicking by Yukari and solid moves by Mark Cheng, the fight scenes are poorly directed - with protective padding visible in the actors' clothing. Favorite line (Yukari): "You are too much, son of bitch." (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Winners and Sinners (Hong Kong, 1983: Sammo Hung)** - Winners and Sinners was the first of what many Hong Kong movie fans consider to be a part of Jackie Chan's 'three brothers' movies (Himself, Sammo Hung and Yuen Biao), even though Jackie's part is minor and Biao only appears in one scene.

However it would set the stage for much of how Jackie changed his career - he plays a cop, the fight scenes are a mixture of brutality and comedy, and the stunts hurt just watching. But the real change is that, for once we see Jackie in a modern setting. What inspired this?

The previous year, the first *Aces Go Places* would dominate the box office, and in February of 1983, the sequel would do almost as well at HK \$23 Million. Could all three Dragons together, also in a modern crime caper comedy/action movie topple them from the top spot?

Nope. Winners and Sinners would finish 2nd at HK \$21 Million and the great Project A (and let's make no mistake, it's better as a movie than either of those two OR the first Aces) would finish 3rd at HK \$19 Million. Around the rest of Southeast Asia, those two movies probably did monster business - but in Hong Kong, they still weren't #1

Directed by Sammo Hung, Winners and Sinners tells the story of five petty criminals who meet in jail - Teapot (played by Sammo Hung), Curly (John Sham), Exhaust Pipe (Richard Ng), Vaseline (Charlie Chin), and Rookie (Stanley Fung) who decide to form a friendship and start a cleaning company, so they can stay out of trouble.

But, a crime boss dealing in counterfeits is released the same day and through co-incidence, their paths will cross, leading to hijinks and some fun fighting.

Adding to the humor is Curly's sister Shirley (played by former Hong Kong beauty queen Cherie Chung), who the group jockey's for affection from. It also features Richard Ng's hilarious 'invisibility' scene.

Jackie Chan plays an unlucky cop who provides some of the better fight scenes, and he has a cool short spar with Yuen Biao during his cameo.

They'd somewhat repeat this whole process with *My Lucky Stars* and *Twinkle Twinkle Lucky Stars*, but more importantly, Chan, Hung and Biao would team up for a number of movies together that many feel are some of Jackie's best fighting movies.

Added notes: That's Moon Lee as Yuen Biao's girlfriend! Mars has a small role as a robber.

Top 10 Hong Kong Box Office for 1983 (of the numbers I have available to me):

1. HK \$23,273,140.00 *Aces Go Places II*
  2. HK \$21,972,419.00 *Winners and Sinners (3 Dragons)*
  3. HK \$19,323,824.00 *Project A (Jackie Chan)*
  4. HK \$15,439,323.00 *Burning of Imperial Palace*
  5. HK \$14,102,667.00 *Espirit D'amour (Alan Tam - 1st Ringo Lam)*
  6. HK \$13,782,062.00 *All the Wrong Spies (George Lam/Brigitte Lin)*
  7. HK \$12,946,443.00 *Perfect Wife?! (Dean Shek)*
  8. HK \$12,021,886.00 *Reign Behind a Curtain*
  9. HK \$09,386,443.00 *Just For Fun (Frankie Chan)*
  - T10. HK \$07,691,332.00 *Play Catch (Alan Tam)*
  - T10: HK \$07,373,743.00 *Hong Kong Playboys (Wong Jing)*
- (Zu: Warriors from the Magic Mountain did HK \$1,587,851!!!)

**Witch from Nepal, The (Hong Kong, 1986: Tony Ching Siu-Tung) – aka *The Nepal Affair*** - The Witch from Nepal is an earlier film from Ching Siu-Tung, the director of *A Chinese Ghost Story*. Anyone expecting this to be a film as rich and satisfying as his later film is bound to be disappointed. Witch is one of those light-headed, mindlessly enjoyable films that Hong Kong is famous for; it's the sort of movie that almost begs you not to think about it too carefully... because if you do, you might be appalled. It's a shame to see Ching apparently trying to live up to the standard set by, say, Alberto de Martino, but we can at least take comfort in the fact that better things followed for Ching and practically everybody else involved.

The film begins with a written and spoken prologue. To paraphrase, it informs us that there are more things in Heaven and Earth, *Huo Re Xiao*, than are dreamt of in our philosophy. There are supernatural powers, it says, that can't be explained by science (probably because they don't actually exist... but I digress, as usual).

The narrator tells us of a primitive race of people who believe their ruler is a direct descendant of their god, and we're warned that evil things are stirring nearby. And so the movie opens in front of a vast and imposing stone structure, where a reverent crowd has gathered to watch the second swearing-in of President George W. Bush...

No, No! I'm sorry. No more political cheap shots, no matter how tempting they may be. We actually see a reverent crowd bowing before a temple with high stone steps, at the top of which their divine ruler is lying on a divan -- asleep. It's a little disconcerting to see all these people waiting expectantly for their leader to do or say something kingly, while he just lies oblivious (let me reiterate: no more political cheap shots).

Suddenly, an ominous pair of feet comes striding up to the temple. Since the owner of these sinister feet is obviously up to no good, the divine ruler's adoring crowd does what the adoring crowd of every divine ruler does when the going gets difficult: they run.

There is one woman in the crowd who takes a little initiative. She dashes up the stairs to the king, who's just beginning to raise himself from his bed, and whispers something to him -- "We're being attacked!", perhaps; or more likely, "Would it please your Majesty to know that at the present moment this temple, of which you are the

Supreme and Anointed Guardian, is under the imminent threat of disturbance by a person or persons possibly bearing ill-will toward Your August Presence..." or however you convey the obvious to a sleep-addled monarch.

His royal highness goes into the temple, where he confronts an enormous phallic idol. From in front of this idol he takes a sword -- hey! Count the surrogate penises with me, everybody! -- just as the black-clad Bad Guy reaches the foot of the stairs. The Bad Guy, who growls like a cat, whips out a big knobby bone (that's three! Three surrogate penises!) and charges up to meet the king. The king unsheaths his sword and joins the fight... only to get his divinely-descended ass handed to him.

While the king is embarrassing himself in combat with a meowling thug, the girl -- remember the girl? She kind-of got lost amid all the obvious male symbolism -- sneaks up to the idol. Draped around the, er, the shaft of the idol is a necklace with two big stones hanging from it... (Sigh. They're not even trying to be subtle about this). Anyway, the girl sneaks off with the idol's stones while the king and the brute are still going at it. Before the cat man can finish off the king, the girl catches up to him and spirits him away (we don't know how she does this, but if things continue true to form it's probably in the biggest SUV in east Asia). The cat man finds out that the holy testicles are gone and howls in frustration.

(I don't know what the cat man is called, but since the movie is called *The Witch from Nepal*, I'm willing to bet his name is "Du". Get it? Cat Man Du? Please don't hit me.)

After the credits, we're introduced to Joe and Ida, two tourists from Hong Kong doing touristy things in Nepal. After the usual montage of local attractions, we see Joe sitting alone on the balcony of his luxurious hotel, sketching. A sudden breeze carries one of his drawings off the balcony; when he peers over the railing to see what's become of it, he sees a robed Nepali woman holding it. Her eyes are a little familiar to us... Joe rushes downstairs, whether because of the drawing or the girl it's hard to say. When he gets there, a porter informs him in English that the girl has left the drawing for him. But although it's certainly his paper, the drawing on it isn't his at all. It shows Joe himself in front of a stone temple, fighting an enormous man in black.

Did I mention that Joe is played by a young Chow Yun-Fat? I believe what we have here could be referred to as an omen.

A little while later, Joe and Ida continue the tourist act by going out on elephants to look for rhinoceros. Joe is bewildered when his rhino sketch suddenly turns into the same drawing he'd seen earlier, of himself fighting the goon from the prologue. At that very moment, Joe's elephant panics and runs off at full speed. Joe is at first able to hang on to the howdah, but he soon bashes his head on an overhanging tree branch and is thrown to the ground. When he comes to, he finds his leg is bloody and mangled. Let's not forget that there are rhinos tramping around in the thick reeds -- Joe decides it would be prudent to get up and start moving, hurt leg or no hurt leg.

Unfortunately, Joe then steps out of a clump of reeds and off a ledge. He tumbles into a river, and is swept along by the current until he bashes his head on a log and is rendered unconscious. At this point, I was thinking that with Joe's rotten luck, all he needed was a waterfall; and sure enough, the next time we see poor Joe, he's lying in a pathetic heap at the bottom of a rocky gorge. Nearby, we see a shadowy figure holding a bloody royal sword...

Ida and the tour guides have mounted a full-scale search for Joe in the brushlands. This search consists of a line of elephants galloping through the reeds, while Ida calls Joe's name. That reminds me of the old elephant joke:

Q: What's the grey stuff between an elephant's toes?

A: Chow Yun-Fat!

But amazingly, the elephants don't squish Joe, even though Joe turns up back in the place where he disappeared, rather than at the bottom of some waterfall somewhere. Joe is flown back to a hospital in Hong Kong with no memory of what happened to him.

What Joe does remember is the face of the mysterious girl he saw in Kathmandu. Well -- at least he remembers her eyes, which were the only parts of her face he really saw.

Ida comes to tend to him, but since Joe is action hero Chow Yun-Fat, he's restless and annoyed by his helplessness. In spite of his busted leg, he tries to force himself into recovery. He does things like standing on his bad leg, or trying to use it to lift his hospital tray. Strong, determined and none-too-bright: that's our Joe.

Still, while he's out on the hospital balcony trying to stand on his bad foot, he catches a glimpse of a passing airplane -- and suddenly, he can stand! Well -- for an instant, at least. Then, as the plane rushes by, he becomes an invalid once more and crashes back into his wheelchair. The mysterious girl's face stares up at him from his dropped sketchbook...

It probably won't surprise anyone to know that the passing plane was a Royal Nepali flight, and that the girl from the prologue was hiding in the baggage compartment. Insert your own treatment-of-women-in-South-Asia joke here. As you might expect after a long flight under a pile of luggage, the girl is worn out from the trip. She staggers to the door of the baggage container and falls to the tarmac.

It will probably surprise everyone even less to learn that the girl is then taken off to the same hospital where Joe is recovering. He catches sight of her being wheeled by in a gurney; and again later, as a half-dozen orderlies attempt to restrain her.

That night, the girl breaks into Joe's room (literally -- she smashes through locked doors with ease). First she bows down in front of the sleeping man, and then she starts trying to remove the bandage from his broken leg. Her attempts awaken Joe, and when he sees her, she panics and flees with some completely unnecessary and destructive acrobatics.

Joe feels compelled to follow her. Don't ask me why... I mean, sure, she's cute and all, but a.) Joe already has a very nice girlfriend; b.) the other girl is leaving a nasty trail of destruction in her wake; c.) she tends to make medical judgments she doesn't really seem qualified to make; and d.) she's not much for conversation. Still, he gets in his wheelchair and goes off to look for her. He finds her curled up in (what's left of) her room, and he offers her a hand in friendship.

The girl then spins him around and pushes him and his wheelchair off the third-floor balcony (what is it about Joe and balconies?). As Joe plunges to the ground, the girl jumps off the balcony after him. In complete disregard of the laws of physics, she catches up to him. Physics, evidently in a lenient mood today, relaxes the law of gravity still further and gives the pair an improbably long time to spin together before they hit the ground. Joe's bandages fly off his leg, and he lands on his feet -- thus proving that he is the Pumaman!

No, no; wait. That's a cheesy Alberto de Martino superhero flick. What I meant to suggest was that the divine ruler who got his butt kicked in the prologue seems to have passed his spirit on to Joe, making him some kind of demigod. Being that Joe's played by Chow Yun-Fat, this may something of a step down for him...

The sounds of a crashing wheelchair brings the orderlies out to see what's going on. The girl jumps three stories to the balcony and hides. Joe tries to climb up after her -- what the hell; after all, his leg has just gone from imminent amputation to perfectly-healed... but he's restrained by the nurses.

Ida comes to pick Joe up soon after, since his leg is miraculously whole again. Later, as Joe heads off to a business meeting, he just happens to pass the hospital. Inside, Hong Kong immigrations has come to arrest the Nepali girl. This would obviously be too much of an inconvenience for her plans, so the girl does her usual acrobatics. Joe sees her swinging from a palm tree, with officials chasing her; so he swings his car around, allowing her to vault in. Unfortunately, the girl's necklace -- the one with the godly stones on it -- gets caught on a branch as she falls.

Joe asks her her name, and she replies -- remember, this is her first line, and we're almost a third of the way through the movie -- "Shiela". Good traditional Nepali name, that (then again, Emily Chu looks about as Nepali as I do). He tries to get more information out of her, and she simply says again: "Sheila". Next, Joe asks her what she has to do with all the strange things that are happening... We're expecting more "Me Tarzan" stuff, but much to his surprise and ours, she says, "You're my new master now. It says so in the Scriptures!" Which is not something she's likely to have picked up in a Cantonese phrasebook.

To show her mystical abilities, Sheila calls forth a smoky spirit from Joe's cigarette. Blue lightning flies out of the electrical outlets in Joe's apartment and joins with the smoky ghost. Then the figure takes Joe by the hand and flows into his body. This proves beyond any reasonable doubt that Joe is the Pumaman!

Or something like that.

The next morning, Sheila nearly sets Joe's apartment on fire when she stuffs his electric stove with kindling and rubs two sticks together. Oh, those wacky Nepalis. After this mild misunderstanding, Joe attempts to teach her about

conveniences of the modern world, such as... forks. You know how it is with these East Asian Ruritarians. When they take the Magic Metal Bird to the Land of Hollow Glass Mountains, where colorful dragons carry people in their stomachs along hard, black rivers, the poor slobs have a tendency to be overwhelmed. They may be masters of spiritual kung fu, but show them a battery-operated toothpick and they're on their knees chanting prayers for protection.

Just once I'd like to see the spiritual "primitive" look the "civilized" guy in the eye and say, "Yes, I see it's a fork, and I know what you can do with it. But where I come from, we consider such sharp tools to be barbaric, and use a much better method. Mr. Chow, allow me to introduce you to something we call chopsticks..."

But no. Instead, Sheila bends the fork with her mind.

Why do all these supernaturally-endowed mystics always have to sink to the level of a third-rate stage magician? Why, when they're supposed to have such power, do they always use it imitating the empty theatrics of Uri Geller? Why, for that matter, do people like Geller, who claim to have such mystical powers in real life, waste their supposed talents by bending flatware? Thereby making it "bentware", and of no use to anybody? Could there be a hidden message here?

But while we're on the subject of silly games, Sheila suddenly sees -- or perhaps merely senses -- Ida coming up to Chow's veranda. She grabs her plate and cup and, yes, her fork, and high-tails it out of sight. Not that she or Joe have anything to hide, right? The wry glances Joe keeps shooting toward the lurking Sheila as he speaks to Ida make us wonder what's really on his mind. As though we had to guess.

There is some attempt at comedy as Joe tries to practice his own new telekinetic skills without Ida catching on. It's amazing that she doesn't: every time he tries, he makes a sound like the lowest notes of a busted concertina. But perhaps that's just a sound effect...

Sheila, in the meantime, has gone back to the hospital to search for her lost stones. The attendants spot her and try to capture her. But Joe has been mysteriously drawn back to the hospital, too, and his psychic kung fu turns out to be more sensitive than Sheila's. Joe finds the palm tree, and as he concentrates, the stones on the branch begin to glow. Just then, the attendants catch up with them, so Sheila jumps up several stories as usual. Joe finds much to his surprise that he can do that, too; in a funny moment, he stands there, grinning a "look what I can do" kind of grin while his pursuers get closer and closer. Sheila manages to dislodge him, and they begin a desperate sprint across the hospital roof. Sheila jumps an amazingly long distance to the palm tree, but Joe hesitates (understandably). Sheila manages to find the stones -- but Joe is caught and dragged off to the police station, where a very unhappy Ida comes to bail him out.

Sheila is waiting for Joe at home, but Joe is furious with her. He orders her out of his house and out of his life. Her lower lip trembling, this acolyte of a mystical god-king -- this disciple of Eastern asceticism -- responds to Joe's rejection by setting herself on fire.

Don't you hate girlfriends who overreact like this?

Joe is horrified, and tries unsuccessfully to put her out. He runs toward her, and their bodies collide -- resulting in an explosion that blows out the roof and all the windows, and virtually destroys Joe's house. Oh -- and did I mention it's raining? It's raining. I really hate it when girlfriends overreact like that. Don't worry about the house, though: it fixes itself without explanation a few scenes later.

Anyway (as a gesture of atonement, perhaps), Sheila gives Joe the holy necklace. And that's not all she gives him, if you know what I mean. No more idols, swords or other surrogates: Sheila's about to meet the real thing. From now on, and for the best of reasons, we won't be seeing Sheila with the mark of the virgin on her forehead... it washes off in the rain, never to be seen again. This is what Joe's been after from the start, but before this he didn't have the stones...

But there's a further complication: the cat warrior has just arrived from Nepal. What took him so long, you ask? He came by boat. Anyway, he's in Hong Kong now, and he wants to be the Pumaman.

(By this point, it wasn't Joe's imminent confrontation with the killer cat-person that had me worried. If you think the epic struggle between Good and Evil is harrowing, just wait until Ida runs into Sheila. Which, because Joe's an

infatuated twit, she soon does. Did I say we were through with surrogates? I made a mistake. There's one more: Joe himself, for acting like a total dick.)

Yeah. Well. You've probably guessed where this is all going. True to form, the movie arrives pretty spectacularly, but you may end up feeling the journey was a bit of a waste. You've probably figured out how the love triangle is going to resolve itself, too: the way it always works out in movies about callow young men with superpowers. Somebody's going to suffer, and it isn't Joe.

But you may not have anticipated... the zombies. Yes: zombies, and not the usual pasty extras or hopping vampires you might expect from a Hong Kong horror film. There's a brief interlude when the cat guy psychically forces Joe and Ida off the road and into an abandoned Christian cemetery. And then, for a few glorious minutes, it's Fulci time, as rotting corpses rise from the muddy ground. These are zombies straight out of any Italian flick, with rotting limbs and hideous faces, moaning as they wave their arms and shamble after Joe's car. You really have to wonder why the cat guy wastes his time chasing kings with bone clubs when he can do really cool things like summon zombie armies. Since his opponents are so busy bending silverware, perhaps he feels he has to meet them on their terms.

If Joe had been played by an actor less charismatic than Chow Yun-Fat, *The Witch* from Nepal wouldn't have been nearly as entertaining. The movie's mystical crisis is trivial, and its romance even less substantial. And certainly its condescension towards the Nepali "primitives" is as offensive as the worst Hollywood depiction of the "Heathen Chinese". But any film that has Chow and zombies in it can't possibly go too far wrong, even if neither are used to their full potential. (by Will Loughlin of *Braineater*)

**Wizard's Curse (Hong Kong, 1992: Yuen Cheung-Yan)** - On vacation in Thailand, which is to Hong Kong horror what Transylvania is to western genre fare: a land of occult lore and strange superstition, Taoist sorcerer Lam Ching Ying (er, Lam Ching Ying) helps local cops raid the black magic boobey-trap-laden hideout of La Mit (Billy Chow) and Kim Sha (Tsui Man-Wah), a devil-worshipping criminal couple who practice Tantric sex kung fu! That's right, when exploding skulls fail to fell the police a quick supernatural shag conjures a deadly energy blast before the killers turn invisible. They kill cops left and right until foiled by Lam's giant paper prayers. "Bastard, go eat shit!" snarls La Mit. Whereupon Master Lam briefly abandons tradition and blasts the suckers dead with a .44 Magnum. That'll learn 'em.

Job done, Lam flies home with a gift of crocodile meat (good for curing asthma, apparently) unaware that elsewhere in a candy-coloured subterranean lair La Mit and Kim Sha's evil master (Yau Gin-Gwok) is preparing a resurrection spell. Aided by his leopardskin bikini-clad sidekicks he employs a potion brewed from "the semen of ninety-nine bastards" and "the menstrual blood of ninety-nine bitches" to bring La Mit and Kim Sha back fused together as the gender-morphing, so-called Terrific Vampire! Being evil he then feeds his hapless assistants to the hungry hermaphrodite as a tasty snack. Bwah-ha-hah! How evil is he? Unfortunately, the now satanically super-powerful duo decide they don't really need their master anymore. So they impale him with their glowing demon penis. Yes, really. Bwah-ha-hah! How evil are they?

Soon La Mit and Kim Sha head off to Hong Kong in search of revenge, of course, though also the next step in their mystical plan for world domination. They must find and kill a girl "born on a spiritual hour" whose saliva can eliminate evil. Yes, really. That girl turns out to be Lam's daughter (small world, isn't it?) lovely Siu Ting (Ellen Chan), a successful doctor, not that her dad appreciates this. Traditionalist Lam would rather Siu Ting spend less time studying for her medical exams and more time praying at her ancestors' altar. Now ask yourself, would you rather receive treatment from a qualified medical professional or someone who respects their dead relatives? Exactly. Even more troubling, Siu Ting dates fellow physician Dr. Julian Zhu (Charlie Cho Cha-Lee) whom Lam's Taoist sixth sense reveals is a secret sex fiend with a closet full of porn and inflatable dolls. All these problems go out the window when the evil hermaphrodite attacks driving Lam and Siu Ting to seek help from cocky cop Cheung Kwok-Keung (er, Cheung Kwok-Keung – seriously, is everyone playing themselves or are the writers too lazy to come up with character names?). Which proves a trifle embarrassing since Siu Ting earlier shared a 'meet cute' treating Cheung for a frankly suspect injury to his penis. Yes, really. Unfortunately, a leather-clad La Mit and Kim Sha pull a Terminator wiping out every cop in the precinct and capture Lam forcing Cheung and Siu Ting on the run in search of a sure way to defeat the indestructible monster.

*Mr. Vampire* (1985) finally made veteran kung fu character actor Lam Ching Ying a star but also typecast him as Hong Kong's answer to Peter Cushing. Here Lam brings his trademark Taoist ghost buster schtick to a fun kung fu horror comedy penned by legendary schlock mogul Wong Jing (no stranger to spooky shenanigans having acted in *The Ghost Snatchers* (1986) and *Evil Cat* (1987)) and directed by Yuen Cheung-Yan who went on to choreograph the

action scenes in *Charlie's Angels* (2000)! Produced by Lo Wei, director of *Fist of Fury* (1972), *Wizard's Curse* is a full-throttle supernatural romp with action and outrageous imagery involving extreme gore and sexual horror reaching psychedelic intensity akin to tentacle porn anime. At the same time it is also a lighthearted comedy. Wong Jing's defiantly lowbrow stamp is all over the film but as a bawdy horror comedy it really works. The nutty plot revolves around a staple theme in Hong Kong horror comedies, namely the clash between traditional values and the modern world with the focus largely on sexual morality. Master Lam not only disapproves of Siu Ting's Catholicism and devotion to medical studies (making him the only Chinese father in history not proud their kid is a doctor) but goes out of his way to preserve her virginity.

At first the message seems deeply reactionary. Lam's instincts about Julian prove correct as he uses Taoist spells to unmask him as a sexual predator who hides a camera in his toilet to spy on Siu Ting and employs an aphrodisiac to turn her into raging nympho until Lam magically shrinks his penis. However, as things play out Wong Jing subverts the hitherto anti-sex theme with a twist revealing the only way for Siu Ting to gain her monster-slaying superpowers is with a spectacular shag with a male virgin. Guess who that turns out to be? Whereas Lam wants to keep Siu Ting a proper young lady, his estranged wife (Mimi Chu Mai-Mai) does not think sex is evil but just a step on the road to maturity. So enthusiastic is mom she immediately rushes out to grab ingredients for a love potion in an amusing Benny Hill-style fast-motion montage while later a converted Lam hilariously tries to get the kids in the mood by playing a cassette tape of the Wong Fei Hung theme from *Once Upon a Time in China* (1991)!

Surprisingly, the one person unenthused about having sex with Siu Ting is hero cop Cheung, which is strange given Ellen Chan certainly steams up the screen. The sultry star came to specialize in sexy roles in supernatural fare with memorably sensual turns in *Doctor Vampire* (1990) and *Eternal Evil of Asia* (1995) where she famously performed oral sex on an invisible man. Wong Jing's script has some nice twists and is full of inventive occult lore (Siu Ting's ability to spit glowing energy balls is certainly novel) while Yeung Cheung-Yan stages outstanding effects sequences combining kung fu with cel animation and ingenious in-camera tricks familiar from his earlier martial arts fantasies *Miracle Fighters* (1982) and *Taoism Drunkard* (1984) which also involve squabbling married sorcerers.

The action builds to a delirious climax where the husband-and-wife team fight the hermaphrodite monster while in the bedroom next door Cheung struggles to achieve an orgasm (why does this guy find Ellen Chan so unattractive?) until Siu Ting straddles him in what one could interpret as a pro-feminist, woman-takes-charge-in-the-bedroom message were this not scripted by Wong Jing. Whereupon mind-blowing orgasms transform them both into kung fu superheroes in flowing white for a spectacular, slime spurting, limb-lopping final battle. However, the closing scene implies Cheung is no more enamoured with Siu Ting than he was before they had sex, leading to a typically tasteless final gag as her mom takes a huge pair of scissors to his manhood. Ouch! The moral seems to be if an attractive female doctor propositions you, you damn well better have sex. You never know, the fate of the world might be at stake. One last question: how exactly does crocodile meat cure asthma? (by Andrew Pragasan of Spinning Image)

**Women on the Run (Hong Kong, 1993: Corey Yuen, David Lai)** - For those who enjoy that genre of film that could be titled "Men are Scum" should take pleasure in this one as there isn't a man worth a plugged nickel in sight. On the other hand fans of trash cinema will find many delights within as well – I know I did. Seeing this 1993 minor exploitation classic twelve years later was a needed reminder of how much fun Hong Kong film was when it was out of control and feared nothing. This was the film industry that churned out these kinds of sleazy gems without batting an eye, but they either have forgotten the art of trash or are afraid to put their foot in it. The last good one that comes to mind was *Naked Poison* from 2000. Where has all the good exploitation gone? This one is a nice trip down memory lane in which the filmmakers happily give us all the tasty ingredients one could ever want with kung fu nude fighting, drug addiction, police brutality, a man getting his penis shot off, a gang rape and some pretty solid action.

As a director, Corey Yuen is associated with a few classic female bonding action films like Michelle Yeoh and Cynthia Rothrock in *Yes Madam*, Joyce Godenzi and Carina Lau in "She Shoots Straight" and Hsu Chi, Karen Mok and Vicky Zhao in *So Close*, but this one came as a surprise with its unsavory aspects and crotch shots. Maybe he just needed to get it out of his system. Like these other films just mentioned it too takes as its premise two women who have to bond together to survive and to kick some male ass – they are just a bit hornier than his usual characters. If Yuen had put Michelle and Cynthia on scaffolding in order to shoot from below them, my guess is he would have needed reconstructive surgery, but the two actresses on display here have no issue with it apparently because they do it on two different occasions!

Siu Yin (Tamara Guo) grows up in rural China dreaming of being the next Bruce Lee or Jet Li and when she wins a martial arts contest she thinks that it's only a matter of getting to Hong Kong to make her dreams come true. Instead, her boyfriend takes her to the big city of Guangdong and turns her into a moneymaking machine on her back and gives her a heroin habit to keep her in line. She puts up with this for a while until one customer urinates

into her championship cup and she bounds out of bed in the nude and gives him a walloping roundhouse kick that sends him crashing through the door. Her boyfriend being the consummate businessman that he is isn't pleased. Soon though she spots him wooing another girl and drives his head through a nail. He is still not pleased and very dead. She escapes to Hong Kong, but it isn't show business waiting for her but more customers lined up down the hall. When her little den of sin is raided by the cops she gets away by climbing up scaffolding and just waits there for them to go away, but instead they send a female cop, Ah Hung (Farini Cheung Yui-ling in her debut film while part of the musical group Ascension) to bring her down. The two get into a fracas – the camera leering upwards like high school peeping tom – before they both fall to earth – unhurt of course.

The two are brought together again when Ah Hung's cop boyfriend David persuades her to go undercover in China to track down the drug dealer King Kong (Korean kicker supreme Kim Wong-jin) and to take Siu Yin with her. The real deal though is that the boyfriend is corrupt and in cahoots with King Kong and they are just setting the two women up to take the fall if need be. This doesn't come as much of a surprise after seeing David suck on her knee like a ripe peach – you just can't trust knee suckers. The pair makes their way into China and knock around a bunch of guys in a well-choreographed scene by Yuen Tak. In particular, Tamara looks extremely able in her martial arts moves and this makes her willingness to disrobe all the more peculiar. They hook up with King Kong but things start going askew when they are met at the Hong Kong airport by rival cop Corey Yuen and somehow they manage to board a plane to Canada – airport security not being what it is now back in 1993. In Canada the girls run into more problems – they get arrested for drug smuggling, beaten by the cops, almost killed by a band of assassins and then gang raped by no doubt hockey fans – all in one day. Welcome to Canada. They find their way somehow back to Hong Kong – resourceful as they are – with only one thing on their minds – to even the score.

The acting here isn't very good, there are some absurd plot holes that are just papered over and the film has a dirty old man sensibility to it that can be a bit cringe worthy at times, but this is just good old fashioned trashy fun in a way that seems to be a thing of the past. By the way, I can only find credits for Tamara for two other films – a low-budget Filipino production called *“Techno Warriors”* (1997) and *“Ghost Promise”* (2000) – and would be curious as to what else she has been up to if anyone knows. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)

**Wonder Seven (Hong Kong, 1995: Tony Ching Siu-Tung)** - Lesser-known Michelle Yeoh vehicle (heh) about a team of seven Mainlander special forces agents working undercover in Hong Kong, making sure everything is okay before the takeover. Their latest mission is to apprehend the bank cards belonging to some shady types (including Yeoh), which lead to an account worth millions of diamonds in Switzerland. Yeoh joins them after she's betrayed by her partner, who's in cahoots with a leak on their side. This film has been dismissed by fans, because of Yeoh is practically a supporting character in her own film (she's top billed). The Wonder Seven aren't very memorable beyond the lead, Kent Cheng, and "the monk" (Xiong Xin Xin). There's a lot of action in this, courtesy of Ching Siu-Tung, Dion Lam (*Spider-Man 2*, *The Storm Riders*), Ching protégé Lau Chi-Ho (*The Big Hit*; *A Better Tomorrow 3*), and Xiong Xin Xin. There are some brief smatterings of martial arts here and there, including a balletic machete fight between lead actor Li Ning and Elvis Tsui Kam Kong. Most of the action, however, is super-stylized gunplay and motorcycle stunts. Mainly for Michelle completists. (by Blake Matthews)

**Wonderful Killer (Taiwan, 1993: Chang Jen-Chieh)- aka *Wonderful Kill*** - “Wonderful Killer” pieces together cameo appearances by Dick Wei and Lin Wei as the focus of a police investigation led by “Kau Chen-mai” (Nadeki) and her partner “Shan-shan” (To Kwai-fa) with the activities of a mentally challenged serial killer (Shing Fui-on). In this low-budget Taiwanese production the murder of a series of young women leads the police to investigate their male partners, resulting in several stimulating martial arts confrontations during which Nadeki and To Kwai-fa display their physical skills – especially tumbling and rolling.

The character “Kal” (sometimes “Kail”) played by Shing Fui-on is secretly in love with a young woman “Ah-hwa” who is his neighbor. When her mother – a maid – is physically assaulted by a group of arrogant female partygoers, her daughter secretly seeks to avenge her – and Kal obliges. Possessed of considerable strength, cunning and knowledge of jungle warfare, Kal demolishes the police sent to track him down, and Miss Kau has to use all her athleticism and flexibility to escape from his clutches and forest traps.

Although the film is often slow going, Nadeki's leather jacketed detective is a pleasure to watch, particularly in moments when she must enter a booby trapped residence or single-handedly flush the killer from his hiding place in the woods. (by Brian of View from the Brooklyn Bridge)



**Yes, Madam! (Hong Kong, 1985: Corey Yuen) – aka Police Assassins; In the Line of Duty 2** - The movie starts off with a bang as Inspector Ng (Yeoh) takes on a small gang of robbers targeting an armored truck. In one of the earliest examples of the art of “gun fu”, Ng jumps and somersaults in, on, and around cars while exchanging bullets with the robbers. The violent sequence ends with Ng coolly blowing the hand off a robber with a 12-gauge shotgun after he refuses to give up. At no point in this scene does Michelle Yeoh use her sex appeal to get the job done; she's a no-nonsense hard-hitter here and that alone is enough to make many a fan just want to drop down a single knee and ask for her hand.

We then move on to the plot, such as it is. Inspector Ng is getting ready to visit an old mentor of hers, a police analyst from Scotland Yard (in the new dub, his name is Richard Norton, an amusing nod to Cynthia Rothrock's frequent co-star and American and Hong Kong action film veteran). Following their dinner, Ng plans on going on vacation in the UK, where she'll be staying with him. But that won't be happening any time soon. Norton is wasted in his room by a hitman, played by perennial movie heavy Dick Wei. Dick is looking for a microfilm that has evidence of some faulty contracting on the part of his boss, played by James Tien. Back in the 1980s, when you needed someone to play a crime boss, you hired James Tien, the same way you hired Roy Chiao whenever you needed a lawyer or a judge. The microfilm, which was hidden in a passport, is taken by two petty thieves, Aspirin and Strepsil (Meng Hoi and John Shum, respectively). They give the passport to their forger colleague, played by respected Hong Kong director Tsui Hark.

This is where things get complicated. Tsui switches the photo on the passport and sells it to some shmo bail-skipper (another perennial HK movie heavy, Eddy Maher), and then turns him in when he gets worried that he'll be snitched on. This leads to a big chase/fight between the bail skipper, Inspector Ng, and the police at the airport. The guy tries to take a hostage, who happens to be Inspector Carrie Morris from England (Rothrock). Needless to say, Carrie doesn't take too kindly to being a hostage and beats the poor sucker to a pulp. Carrie and Ng become partners, but initially don't like the idea, mainly because Carrie thinks Ng is too soft and Ng thinks Carrie is too brutal. We've all seen this before.

But the bail-skipper doesn't like being snitched on, so he tries to get back at Tsui for tattling on him. This gets Tsui in trouble with the police, who figure out that he's in cahoots with Aspirin and Strepsil. At about the same time, Dick finds out where they are, which leads to a chase sequence followed by a fight in a nightclub between Ng, Carrie and Dick. Now that they know they're in danger, Aspirin and Strepsil try to get police protection. Carrie and Ng, however, won't be so kind as to simply throw the men in an isolated cell and leave them there. They know that the microfilm has to be in their possession, whether they are aware of it or not. And when the microfilm is found, the only thing preventing Ng and the police from incarcerating Tien is sudden surfeit of greed on Tsui and Aspirin's part.

While some may complain about the trivial nature of the plot and the overused microfilm macguffin, anybody who's familiar with 80s HK action cinema will know that plot was always a secondary concern in these movies. It's something to give the heroes some reason to be beating the snot out of each other and performing death-defying stunts. That's all. The problem with this movie is the lack of confidence that director Corey Yuen had in his two female protagonists. Too much time is spent with Aspirin, Strepsil and Tsui, including two extended celebrity cameo gags featuring Sammo Hung, Richard Ng and Wu Ma that really didn't need to be in the final film. While the two women do dominate the action portion of the film, the drama is mainly tied to the three petty criminal supporting characters.

This being an early Corey Yuen directorial effort, it's fascinating to see just how many characteristics of his later films show up here. Overwrought death scene of one of the protagonists preceding the climax? Check. Powerful female fighters? Check. Blood spurting onto the camera lens? Check. Violent action punctuated by goofy comedy? Check.

Where the film really made its mark was in the action (natch!). I mentioned the first set piece. The action comes in fits and spurts between the explosive opening and the unforgettable finale. The best mid-film fight scene is probably the airport chase with Eddy Maher, with Cynthia Rothrock showing off some excellent legwork against the surprised criminal. The two-on-one bathroom fight with Dick Wei is also solid.

Nonetheless, most people will leave the film talking about the climax. For a good five whole minutes (closer to ten if you count John Shum's antics and a breather where the combatants exchange verbal barbs), Rothrock and Yeoh take on a mansion full of stuntmen armed with long, curved watermelon knives, making sure that each of them is dispatched in the most painful way possible. That usually involves the poor sucker being thrown or knocked through glass, wooden furniture or both. Rothrock does some traditional pole fighting for her fighting, while Michelle

displays the nimbleness acquired from years of ballet training. Finally, Michelle Yeoh fights Sammo Hung stunt team member Chung Fat, who sports some crazy eyebrows and a mean dagger, while Cynthia Rothrock fights Dick Wei. Rothrock performs a great over-the-back kick against Wei, although during filming, Wei hit so hard that Rothrock refused to fight him in any other movie of hers (though they did co-star as villains in Sammo Hung's *Millionaire's Express*). The fight sequence equals the more famous mall fight from Jackie Chan's *Police Story* on every level, and shows us that women are just as physically capable of doing the sort of insane stunt-driven action that Jackie popularized during that decade. Action directors Corey Yuen and Meng Hoi received a nomination for Best Action Design at the 5th Annual Hong Kong Film Awards, but ended up losing to Jackie Chan's Stuntman Association for, well, *Police Story*.

For years, the film was not available in mainstream video stores in the USA. One might have found it at a video store specializing in Asian films, although it would not have been subtitled and may have been dubbed into a Southeast Asian language, like Vietnamese or Hmong. The alternative would have been to find a mail-order company and get a gray-market copy, which was what I did during the late 90s. My vendor was Advantage Video, which sent me the original International dub with Dutch subtitles(!). The international dub was interesting, since it eliminated about ten minutes of footage (including a lot of the actresses' bickering and the false arrest sequence leading up to the heroines turning in their badges and pursuing vigilante justice) and inexplicably tacked the opening action sequence to Sammo Hung's *Where's Officer Tuba*, where David Chiang's stunt double performs a flying kick through the windshield of a truck in movement, on to the beginning. It also featured a lot of profanity, especially the "F-bomb" and gave Cynthia Rothrock's character a British accent. The recent dub has restored the missing scenes and changed some of the profanity to something less offensive. (by Blake Matthews)

**Yes Madam (Taiwan, 1995: Huang Chun-Yu, Chen Chun-Liang)** - Worse still [than *Yes Madam '92: A Serious Shock*] was the Taiwanese action comedy *Yes Madam* (1995), a film so devoid of any sort of comic restraint that it makes Jackie Chan's *City Hunter* look like a Woody Allen film in comparison. Cynthia Khan plays Lydia Lee, the leader of a special crime-fighting squad called "The A-Team." She dates her former fellow student and security guard, Dave, who one day finds a little black book belonging to Bryan, an evil supervillain who dresses like a bad guy from a cheap traditional chopsockey film. Boyfriend guy is marked for death by the Bryan, and only Lydia Lee can help him.

The comedy is goofy and absurd, with characters breaking out into song and dance for no reason or acting like they're in a live-action cartoon. Bryan is flanked by a guy in Peking Opera make-up and a grill, not to mention two flunkies whose faces are painted green and white and who can kiss a person until they die. The boyfriend has a goofy family, including a perverted 8-year-old brother who can remove a person's pants with his mind and another younger brother who spends his time dressing like Goku and practicing drunken boxing. That's the level of film we're dealing with here.

The action, choreographed by Christopher Chan, who plays Dave and whose biggest credit was Assistant Action Director on Stephen Tung's *Extreme Challenge* (2001), is too sparse to justify the time spent watching the movie. The action is frequently wire-assisted and sped-up, although the first random fight scene is pretty fun. The rest of it is too idiotic to be enjoyable, especially at the end when two villains start flying around and firing Chi blasts at Lydia Lee like an early 90s *wuxia pan*, despite the film's modern setting. I cannot in good conscience recommend the film to anyone, even Cynthia Khan completists. It's *that* bad. (by Blake Matthews)

**Yes Madam 5 (Phillipines, 1995: Philip Ko Fei)** - Less aggressively bad [than *Yes Madam (1995)*], but still an utter waste of the talent involved, was *Yes Madam 5* (1996). Directed by Philip Ko, one could only imagine how the guy who participated in so many important movies, Shaw Brothers and otherwise, could direct and choreograph such tripe. Khan plays Inspector Yeung, a HK police officer on the trail of the Malaysian girlfriend of a murdered undercover cop. What she doesn't initially realize is that her crime boss boyfriend, played by Chin Siu-Ho (*Fist of Legend* and *The Tai Chi Master*) is also involved in the case. Despite his wanting to go straight, Chin is dogged at every corner by another member of the gang, played by Philip Ko. Lots of drama occurs before the action begins, although when it finally does, it's directed so limply that once again I can't help but wonder how a person could make such a bland film with so many talented people.

The action is extremely stingy, not to mention badly filmed. Chin Siu-Ho performs a few nice aerial kicks, and Billy Chow shows up to show everybody that he's faster and more powerful than everybody else, but even then he only gets a single fight. Khan's fights are awkwardly photographed and do nothing to flatter her skills. Another Girls n' Guns hard hitter, Sharon Yeung Pan Pan, shows up in the first scene as a Mainland cop and gets a brief fight, but her scene really has nothing to do with the rest of the movie. It's a disparaging sight, this movie. (by Blake Matthews)

**Yes Madam '92: A Serious Shock (Hong Kong, 1993: Albert Lai) - aka *Death Triangle*** - With a title like that and a cast that features the Girls n' Guns Trifecta: Moon Lee, Cynthia Khan, and Yukari Oshima, one would expect nothing more than pure HK action genius at work. That turns out to not be the case. The premise is certain solid, but the execution is severely lacking.

Moon Lee and Cynthia Khan play May and Wan Chin, fellow Hong Kong cops who went through the police academy together. Wan Chin is engaged to another cop, played by *Sex and Zen's* Lawrence Ng. The fellow once had an affair with May, but broke it off when he decided to get serious with Wan Chin. When May finds out that the couple will emigrate following the nuptials, she simply snaps.

She kills the poor sap and manipulates another admirer on the force to help her put the blame on Wan Chin. But the drama doesn't end there. Wan Chin goes into hiding with a car thief named Coco (Yukari Oshima), but it doesn't take long before May finds out. May has her admirer do horrible things like kidnapping her friends and setting them on fire in order to force Coco to reveal where Wan Chin is. More horrible things happen before the two women confront an increasingly-psychotic May in a warehouse.

The major problem with the movie is the lack of decent action. The first act is promising, but once fiancé boy is out of the picture, the movie tones down the action and turns up the torment of Coco, which is not very exciting. The finale in the warehouse is especially a let-down, partly because Yukari Oshima doesn't contribute much to the fighting, but also because the choreography is sadly muted. I expected more from veteran Fung Hak-On—who cameos early on as a random perp in a scene that clashes tonally with everything that comes later. All three of the ladies have given much better performances in other films, and it's said to see them fight só generically here, that is, whenever the director decides that they should fight.

Moreover, the absence of fisticuffs worthy of the first *In the Line of Duty* films is doubly disappointing when you consider just how many evil deeds Moon Lee's May has piled onto her résumé by the time the finale rolls around. I mean, she has her boytoy transform Coco's best friend (Waise Lee) into a drug addict for crying out loud! I was fully expecting Khan and Oshima to kick and spin kick Moon Lee's character into a broken, bloody mess. But I was denied that sort of consolation. As a result, we have a movie with three action queens whose titular “serious shock” is nothing more than the disappointment gleamed from how much their skills is wasted. (by Blake Matthews)